

LOVING
AND
LOTH



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LOVING AND LOTH.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“ROSA NOEL” AND “THE SISTERS LAWLESS.”

“Escape me?
Never——
Beloved!
While I am I, and you are you,
So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving, and you the loth,
While the one eludes
Must the other pursue”
R. BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1875.

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LOVING AND LOTH.

CHAPTER I.

POOR MRS. DAWNAY !

THE few days left to Susie in her aunt's house passed more like a troubled dream to her than dreamless reality.

She was compelled to recognize in Eugene Everard a quite new and strong determination to see her, talk to her, tear up by its roots her forced liking for the lover who had done her so much honour in selecting her out of a world of handsome and distinguished women.

It seemed such rank ingratitude to swerve from her fealty to him. It was so foreign to the honesty of her nature to foster that against which her conscience rebelled, and every true and honourable instinct arrayed itself. For she knew that she, by her half-heartedness in right doing, and he by his persistence in wrong doing, *were* fostering what would soon be in her stronger than honour, gratitude, ambition, expediency, and all else which the world finds ponderable against that strongest of all invisible, inevitable, uncompromising, invincible, intangible agencies.

Had Susie trusted Eugene more, she would have seen her way with the greatest clearness; but hers was too shrewd and suspicious a nature for her to be easily deceived; and into those days like a troubled dream came sharp hints of false play and double dealing. If she could have substantiated them, she would have found

safety in a rough, advantageous awakening. But there was always enough doubt and uncertainty to make her say to herself, "I will leave things as they are a little while longer, and then—" She always let this resolution trail off into nothingness.

She concealed nothing from Hungerford, but Eugene had the art to give her nothing to conceal. There were no more meetings in Kensington Gardens, yet the days were full of moments stolen from Ranicar as his portmonnaie might have been stolen, under his very eyes.

It had been easy enough to say that Eugene was to be made a stranger of, and to cross his path no more. The words were idle ones. With Mrs. Willis and Alice having always a welcome for Eugene both in their home and at picture shows, concerts, lectures, séances, or wherever he chose to appear, Ranicar was as powerless as if he had been made of wood and stationed

at a tobacconist's shop-door. And although he trusted Susie with the implicit trust that a man gives to an object selected by himself for himself, because of the valuable qualities that he is a proud believer in, he looked forward eagerly to the coming of Mrs. Dawnay, and to Susie's removal from unavoidable intercourse with Eugene.

On a wild, blustering March day the widow arrived in London. Life seemed to have grown smoother and brighter since the dealing out of good fortune to Susie. All the dull realism of failure appeared about to end now, and the romance of success to be beginning.

She went directly to the rooms that had been taken for her in Clarges Street, and there, waiting for her, she found Susie.

"How well you are looking, mamma," was the first thing Susie said. She knew that the conversation between them would be the vehicle of self-disclosure, and she

feebly tried to stave off the crisis with common-places. But Mrs. Dawnay sprang instantly, as was natural, to the subject that occupied all her mind.

“ Oh, Susie ! I am so glad, so proud, so satisfied. Only think of my little girl coming up here to find her fate at seventeen (as her mother did). Let me look at you. Let me see if you are changed.”

She clasped Susie’s shoulders ; looking her smilingly and lovingly in the face.

The honest gray eyes, which seemed to be larger and deeper than of old, looked into the soft brown ones for an instant, and then the lids fell suddenly. Susie, under her mother’s scrutiny, changed—if she had not been changed before—into a creature less childish, less flippant, less pleasure-loving, less feather-brained. Her mother’s motherly glance seemed to draw out the true meaning and import of her nature as fire draws out the significance of words written in sympathetic ink.

“He is a charming fellow, Mr. Hungerford—Ranicar,” said Mrs. Dawney.

“Oh, charming,” echoed Susie, faintly.

Mrs. Dawney clasped the shoulders she still held more firmly, and gazed more searchingly into the small, pale face.

“It is the most *thoroughly* satisfactory thing to me, Susie, and you are very happy, of course?”

Susie had foreshadowed this question to herself, and had imagined that she could dissemble, and that she had enough power of deception at command to answer coolly, “Yes, very.”

But she overrated the Devil’s share of her capacities. The impulsive honesty that was in her was stronger than all promptings of expediency, all urgings to concessive falsities, and soft-hearted hypocrisy.

She hardly knew herself how it was, but Mrs. Dawney knew that she fell sobbing on her neck, saying with almost

tragic emphasis, "Happy? I am miserable!"

"Oh, Susie, Susie!" cried her mother, sinking back into a chair, "this comes on me like a thunder-clap. Why are you wretched? What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened," said Susie, trying to control herself. "The outside is all just the same; but I don't care for him, I can't care for him! I watch the clock on the mantel-piece all the time he is with me, and it seems to stop while he is there. I feel as if I had to mount a ladder to get at him! he is so much older than I am; so different from me, and yet he is so kind, so indulgent! I am cross, and he likes me; I am silly, and he likes me; I show my stupidity and ignorance, and he likes me still! I am so proud of having him choose me, too. Is it not the strangest thing in the world that I cannot manage to love him?"

Mrs. Dawnay did not answer ; she felt as if some one had given her a buffet in the face. She had come up prepared to find a pleased and willing captive, and she found instead an unwilling victim.

“ You will grow fond of him,” she murmured, wishing to answer quickly, and not being able to frame a less common-place rejoinder.

“ It is of no use to try,” said Susie. “ I might as well try to kiss my own cheek.”

“ Then what do you intend to do ?” asked Mrs. Dawnay.

She had no sooner spoken, than she regretted it. Why allow to a girl of seventeen that you consider her competent to form and carry out intentions ?

“ I intend,” answered Susie, promptly, “ to tell him how I feel towards him, and ask him to release me.”

“ My child, be guided by me. Give yourself time to know him better. He is,

as you say, much older than you, and different from you in every respect. Try to reach his level ; try to understand him better ; try to follow, if even at a distance, his modes of thought. Do not say anything rashly and impulsively, I do beg of you."

She might as reasonably have asked water not to quench fire.

"I am afraid I don't know any other way of doing things," said Susie, sincerely, "and it is all very easy to talk of understanding him, and trying to reach his level, but suppose I *did* reach his level, and *did* get to understand him, that would not make me care for him—"

"Lunch, if you please, ma'am."

Mrs. Dawney had been travelling since eight in the morning, and felt faint and famished. She got up, and went into the dining-room, Susie following her, but her appetite seemed all gone. How could she

eat with such a dreadful shifting of scenes having taken place ?

“ Park—Mansion in the distance,” it had been. Now it was “Humble Cottage ; nothing in the distance worth mentioning.”

Poor Mrs. Dawney ! She was very gentle, and unemotional, and non-upbraiding under her disappointment. She could only trust to her own soft influence over her child, and to Hungerford’s doing or saying, or being the peculiar and especial thing that Fate had ordained Susie should find lovable.

Her daughter’s burst of confidence being at an end, it was impossible to extort further acknowledgments from her.

“ You have given me a headache and a heart-ache,” said Mrs. Dawney, after they had got back to the drawing-room, and pressing her hands on her temples.

Susie felt some self-reproach at this, but

through all her uneasiness ran an under-current of clearest hope for the future.

“I am sorry,” she answered, but I can’t help it. Wait, mamma, and we’ll all be happy yet.”

Here the sound of horses drawn up with a suddenly arrested rush before the door, broke in on them. There was a tremendous rap, and in a moment a card and note were brought up to Mrs. Dawnay.

“Lady Frances Willoughby,” read the widow. “Ah, yes! she is a first cousin of Mr. Hungerford.”

The note was an invitation to dine the next night but one.

There was a silence.

“Do you see much of young Everard?” asked Mrs. Dawnay, suddenly.

“Yes,” answered Susie; “he is a tremendous favourite at Aunt Adria’s. He is a great deal there.”

A suspicion of wonderful accuracy shot

through Mrs. Dawnay's mind, but she said nothing ; yet somehow after this they talked more freely and light-heartedly than they had done before.

“ And how is dear old Sir Alfred ?” asked Susie, after a while. “ Have you been great friends together, Mèry ?”

“ Yes, we are firm and fast friends. He would be better if he did not eat and drink in a way that is unmerciful to his constitution ; I should like to see his face not quite so red. He will be in town before very long, he tells me.”

Again there was a trampling of horses' feet at the door, and the knocker was thumped vigorously.

“ There is Ranicar Hungerford,” said Susie, frowning. “ I know the peculiar jingle of his pole-chains.”

She was right. Ranicar presently entered the room, shook hands warmly with his future mother-in-law, and would have

kissed his affianced if she had not tossed her head away, crying, "No, I am tired of kissing and being kissed to-day. I have not seen mamma since November, remember, and I have to give her all the kisses I owed her for that long time."

Mrs. Dawnay, fatigued as she was, would not leave the room, for in her presence Susie could not say the words that should free her from Ranicar.

They all talked and laughed, and drank tea, as if the fate of each one of them was not trembling in the balance.

Susie was colder with him, perhaps, than he had ever found her, but then it was so bewitching to watch her loving, caressing ways with her mother, that Hungerford overlooked her chilliness with himself, fancying that he understood it, and thinking it a new and delightful phase of her character, this adoration of her beautiful mother, which until now had been undivided.

“We are to dine with my sister-in-law to-night,” said Mrs. Dawnay, as Ranicar rose to take his leave; “shall you be there?”

“Unfortunately I am bound to dine with a cousin of mine who has just come up. By-the-way, she was to call on you to-day or to-morrow. But I shall see you to-morrow morning.”

“Your cousin’s card was brought me just now, and an invitation to dine to-morrow,” said Mrs. Dawnay.

“Oh, that’s all right,” returned Ranicar, and went away more deeply in love with the quaint, simple, affectionate object of his choice than he had ever been before.

It was a family dinner at the Willis’s. Only the Dawnays and Mr. Everard.

If any one would care to know what Eugene’s cruel pastime was like, let them listen as he bends his golden brown head over Susie in that quiet corner of the

drawing-room after dinner. Susie is all in white, with no ornament; not even a bow of ribbon in her hair. He had murmured something about "beauty unadorned," altogether hackneyed and conventional, but not unpleasing to unsophisticated seventeen.

"I don't believe in beauty unadorned, except for beauties," said Susie, gaily.

"What am I to say?" he returned; pretending to think that something was expected of him, and that he was cornered. "You are the sort of woman, or girl, with whom one connects a perfume, a flower, a song—with whom it seems impossible not to have some romantic and tender association; and these women are rarely what are called beauties."

"Oh!" said Susie, the soft light of deep gratification overspreading her face, "A flower, a song, a perfume! Think of me always then, when you hear the song

you liked the other night when I sang it,—

‘When the lamp is shattered.’

If you hear far sweeter voices than mine sing it, forget that they *are* sweeter for one moment, while you remember that I once sang the song, and asked you to think of me when you should hear it again.”

Her voice, in saying these simple words, was memorable as a plaintive strain of music heard in a dream; and her large, clear eyes, as she looked at him, seemed to him for one brief instant—

“Sweetest eyes were ever seen.”

Then other thoughts and feelings, desires and recollections, rose in his mind like a tumultuous sea, and swept away the callow prepossession. In an instant he was able to continue carrying out the purpose which he had made himself believe was not ignoble because of its success being impossi-

ble, unless Susie had been unloving towards Hungerford. And there was a grain of justice in this self-vindication. It is very easy to push on where there is no resistance offered; and what resistance can be stronger than the profound indifference of a woman whose heart-hunger is satisfied.

Eugene's moral obliquity on this point was so great, that he could not help finding a piquant pleasure in the grand overthrow he was effecting. It tickled his moral palate, this flavour of retaliation, flattered self-love, Lothario-ism, and triumphant malice. Besides this, he found Susie a pleasing little thing, who, under any circumstances, might have drawn him on to the exercise of his peculiar powers.

"Do you think," he rejoined,—and to have heard his voice one would have imagined that his heart was stirred—"that it will be only *one song* that will remind me of you? Do you suppose that I shall ever

stand in a garden on an August evening without thinking of you? That I shall ever see a fox-terrier without remembering some one who owned a fox-terrier named Skip? That I shall ever see a girl in white and pink, without a picture coming before me of some one whom I once drove through the lanes of the Isle of Wight, with dark curling hair, and dressed all in white and pink? That I shall ever walk in Kensington Gardens without sighing for a light-footed some one to run races with, as I shall never run again? And now give me a flower, that I may be able to have the sweetest recollection of all when I see one like it; a white flower, so that it will have a resemblance to the white living flower whom some one else has gathered, and is to wear."

As Susie listened to him, her mute lips involuntarily formed the word "Never!" but she gave no audible response whatever

to words that made her cast every consideration but one to the winds.

Eugene looked about the room. "There are no flowers here of the sort I want," he said ; " come into the conservatory with me, and get me one."

She rose, and with him following her, stepped out into the conservatory, which was a little place, but well stocked, and with a hanging lamp that cast a subdued light over the plants and flowers.

The March wind was boisterously at work outside, extracting mournful noises from loose sash, and uncovered key-hole, and unprotected crack ; clouds coursed like greyhounds across the moon's pale disc.

Eugene found a stephanotis covered with fragrant starry blooms. " Give me one of these," he said to Susie.

She snatched one off carelessly ; trying with all her might to rob the scene of anything like seriousness.

“ Kiss it,” she said, childishly, and holding it towards him with a slight, mischievous laugh.

He took it, and bent his head over it irresolutely.

“ After all, what does it matter which flower I kiss ?” he said, and drew Susie towards him.

“ It matters very much to me !” she cried, tearing herself away from him, while tears of anger and mortification rushed to her eyes. “ How bitterly one can be made to regret saying one or two little meaningless words !”

“ Wait ! You shall not rush away from me in a rage. You must tell me that you forgive me. I could not resist——”

It was all over with Ranicar now. For Susie trusted Eugene then. Then, when he was at his sorriest, she trusted him most fully.

For her, there was but one interpreta-

tion to a kiss. She little knew how many meanings there were to him.

“I shall never forgive you,” she said, trying to get past him and into the room again.

“*Never?* You are mistaken; I shall be forgiven some day because I shall be forgotten, and my misdeeds with me. You must take ‘Never’ back, and say something less unqualified. Say, ‘As long as I remember you’ (which will be three months perhaps), ‘I shall not forgive you. I shall think of you, as I have a right to do, with dislike and anger.’ ”

“Oh, I don’t have such long, carefully expressed thoughts as that,” returned Susie, pausing; “no; I repeat, I shall *never* forgive you.”

Because she would never forget him? Did she mean that?

Eugene’s blue eyes betrayed some inner satisfaction or amusement; but Susie, not

being able in her confusion to look at him, was unconscious of it.

She managed to slip past him, and without another glance at him, or word to him, went back to the drawing-room. Already her heart was beginning to sink.

“Sing us a song, Susie,” said Mr. Willis, laying his hand on her shoulder.

“Have you missed me at all, Uncle Willis?” asked she, bending her head back, and looking up at him.

Somehow in these days it seemed as easy to Susie to like people as it had once been hard.

“Of course I have. But you? There’s only one person now that you would miss—ha! ha!”

“Mamma?” said Susie. “Yes, I certainly should miss her more than any one else in the world.”

“‘*Mamma!*’ Sly, shy missy. Well, go and sing.”

While she sang, Eugene hovered over her, biting his lips now and again, as if stung by secret thoughts.

What man with a soul could be proud of this evening's transaction, on reviewing it in cold blood? Eugene's sleepy conscience started broad awake, and prompted him to mislead Susie and wrong Hungerford no more. Passion, too, had its violent word to say, urging him to cease trifling, and go to Swanbury Crescent for *amusement* no longer, but for reckless self-compromise.

As he began to make good resolves for the future, he ceased to reproach himself for the past. He was no self-disciplinarian and accuser, nor was he given to self-analysis. When deeds were actually committed, or words spoken by him, he sometimes passed judgment on them. As results of unquestioned motives, he sometimes arraigned them, but the moral soil where fructified the roots of which they were the

fruit he let lie fallow, and his proclivities had always been mischievous from a boy.

“Oh, Love ! who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
Why choose you the frailest
For your cradle, your home, and your bier ?”

sang Susie. As he looked at her uplifted eyes and profile, there was in them he knew not what of the cherubic, the innocent, the honest.

Her song ended with those words, and into its last minor chords there trailed off a sigh for accompaniment, not from her, but from him.

“Good-night,” he said, holding out his hand to her. “I am going ; I have an engagement.”

There was something so new and strange in his voice, that she looked up at him startled.

He avoided her eyes, but pressed her hand so that she seemed to feel all her little knuckles meeting.

“Going? It is very early,” she said.

“I know it, but I have an engagement that I cannot break.”

He turned away, said good-night to the others, and was gone.

“Susie,” said Mrs. Dawnay gravely, as they drove back that evening, “by all means break your engagement to Mr. Hungerford. You are not true to him. Every moment that you keep that ring of his on your hand, and leave him in ignorance of your real feeling towards him, you are doing him a grievous wrong. Let this be the last night that you are bound to him, and he is bound to you.”

Susie was dumb. There was no anger in her mother’s voice, only a sternness that she had never heard before in its soft tones.

“I hope you are not disappointed in me, mother,” she faltered out.

“Yes; and surprised in you.”

“ Oh, mamma, mamma !” cried Susie, burying her face in the corner of the brougham, “ when what I did, I did to please you more, oh, far more than for anything else !”

In her turn Mrs. Dawnay was silent. Perhaps she had divined this already.



CHAPTER II.

RANICAR'S LETTER.

SUSIE awoke the next morning with the exhaustion of a night spent in dreams which continued fantastically the inner conflict of her waking hours.

She came down to breakfast, nerved for what she supposed would be the most painful interview she would ever have in her life. A sense of her own insignificance, and of Hungerford's importance, gave a touch of incongruity, almost grotesqueness, to the idea of her throwing him over, *jilting* him,

Ranicar Hungerford, who had it in his power to be so fastidious, to choose so squeamishly.

Just as she had mind and memory armed and equipped with words suitable, hardly gleaned from her small store, and rehearsed with a trembling conviction of her own inability to say what was right and fitting, unless she thought it out carefully beforehand, a note was brought to her.

“MY DEAREST SUSIE,” it ran,

“I am called down to Hungerford, and therefore shall not be able to see you until this evening at my cousin’s.

“Yours ever,

“R. H.”

Susie threw it down with an extravagant gesture intended to denote despair.

“What is the matter?” asked Mrs. Dawnay, looking up from her newspaper.

“I had thought that it would be all over by this evening, and now I have got to live this whole long day out feeling that it is before me still !” She picked up the note from the floor, and handed it to the widow. “ Oh, how I wish it was over.”

Mrs. Dawnay did not echo the wish. She threw the newspaper aside, and after glancing at Ranicar’s note, sat idly playing with the trifles on her chatelaine, and musing meanwhile on the strangeness of her child, Susie, being actually battling with a woman’s enemies, expediency and a love received, but unreciprocated. “ Come,” she said at last, “I want to go out and buy a few things. Put on your bonnet. This is perversity in you. You have always been perverse since you were a toddling baby. If it had been Mr. Hungerford, instead of Eugene Everard, who came down and broke your fast of being snubbed and ignored, it would all have been as smooth as possible.

It happened that the Sleeping Beauty's right prince 'had happy eyes,' and was 'lighter footed than the fox;' but the result would have been the same if he had had eyes of the sombrest melancholy, and had been slow and dignified in his mode of walking. Do you see the analogy I wish to draw? or don't you understand the meaning of the word analogy?"

Susie only saw fit to reply that it was so long since she had been snubbed, that she had almost forgotten how it felt, and took herself out of the room with such raw haste that she shut her gown in with the door; partially freeing herself by nearly tearing it off her back.

Her mother heard her saying to herself well in a "well-it-might-have-been-worse" tone,

"Oh, it is only the gathers."



CHAPTER III.

SUSIE RETURNS THE RING.

LADY Frances Willoughby was a short, dumpy woman who looked like an owl match-box. Her manners were an odd combination of self-distrust and self-importance, and were so disagreeable that any poor attempt at dignity which her night-bird face and squat form would have allowed her to make was frustrated by her total want of courtesy, which killed dignity outright. She was so loaded with bows, flounces, fringes, ends of ribbon, as to have a *tattered* ap-

pearance. Her husband had been travelling in the East, and was not yet returned.

She shook hands with Susie as if she had a back-board on and could only advance her hand so far (not much beyond her fat waist), and tried to pretend that she was not looking her over from head to foot. Susie, being pre-occupied, was less sensitive to the visible agency of ugly awkwardness than usual, and meekly accepted Lady Frances as a disagreeable fact, without analyzing why she was so.

There were so few guests at dinner that the conversation nearly all the time was general; and after dinner quite a flock of people came in, and she had not exchanged more than half-a-dozen words with Hungerford.

What had to be done could not be done to-night; but Susie had a little parcel in her pocket that she was quite determined

Ranicar should have before she slept, and which, when received by him, would have made the beginning of the end.

They prevailed on her to sing; and as she seated herself at the piano he came beside her.

“Sing ‘When the Lamp is shattered,’” he said to her.

“No,” answered Susie, looking away from him, and fixing her eyes on the most distant object within range—a life-sized marble nymph, kneeling on one knee, and glancing amorously over her shoulder at a highly conventional drawing-room chair—“I shall never sing that song again.”

“What do you mean?” he said, his whole face hardening; “Not when I ask you particularly to do so?”

“No,” repeated Susie, “not for you more than for any one else; I shall never sing it again.”

She struck the opening notes of her ac-

companiment, and he moved away from her in indignation.

A suspicion, horribly lacerating to his pride and self-love, and to his heart too, entered into his mind and took possession.

How gaily she was singing an airy French song. And she must know that she had offended him whom others had found it no light thing to offend. He looked straight into her face, purposely giving to his expression a severity and anger that he meant should tell on her. She just glanced at him as she would have done at a stranger, glanced away again, faltered for an instant, and then the notes of her penetrating voice rang out as roundly as before.

He bit his lip, and seating himself on the ottoman beside a young lady with blue shoes, who had a melancholy and stranded appearance in her loneliness, devoted himself to her for nearly all the rest of the

evening ; her face was familiar to him, but he had forgotten her name.

Once he got up and made a few steps towards Susie, but she eluded him. He did not try to speak to her again until just before she went away. Then he had her near for a moment, but he could not get her to look at him.

“I want you to acknowledge,” he said, “that you have behaved in a most disenchanting, unlovable way this evening.”

“Yes,” rejoined Susie, fumbling in her pocket, “I do acknowledge it most freely. I am always so, but I have been so more than usual to-night. Here—here—is something I brought to give you, and will you please come early to-morrow morning that I may say something to you ; something very special.”

She slurred over these weighty words in her awe of her stern lover, her discomposure at the momentous step she was taking, and

hurried after her mother. At the door she turned—not because she wished to do so, but because she seemed impelled by the force of his stronger will—and looked back at him.

She never forgot his dark, haughty visage as she saw it then, with its hunger of the eyes, its immobility of lip, its granite grey hue.

Mechanically he placed the box in his pocket, and turning on his heel, went back to the girl with the blue shoes ; quickly, so that Susie should see him going, and in the same voice that he had spoken a few minutes ago—neither hardness or strain in it—said a few conventional words which elicited an unnecessary laugh ; lingered, joining slightly and coldly as he always did, in her merriment, and then taking her white-gloved hand in his ungloved one, bade her good-night with amenity.

As the lamps of his little brougham

gleamed through the rainy streets they flashed on many faces that were poverty-stricken, sin-stricken, sickness-stricken; but not on one more woe-begone than his would have been, had a sudden glare revealed it. He was down on the cushions in much the same position that a man is in who has been flung out of a dog-cart. One arm was twisted behind him, the other was extended—flaccid, and with upturned nerveless palm—on the seat beside him. His head was bent at the neck until the [chin pressed heavily on his breast.

On reaching his house in Bruton Street, he imposed on himself his usual unruffled calm of manner, and going upstairs, shut himself into his room alone with a ghostly enemy.

A tempter, who insidiously promised what in its performance was an undoing.

Ranicar paced restlessly backwards and forwards.

There was abasement in yielding ; there was the agony of gnawing nerve-hunger in resisting. His jaded faculties craved the soft lapping in oblivion that moral obligation denied them. His senses were greedy for the cankering food that satisfied them with the measureless joy of dreams. His whole being yearned mightily for the one more step into vitiation which could be taken to-night.

It was a fierce struggle between the famished longing of an essentially human appetite—an appetite in which there is no brute instinct to quell—and that divine appetite-less thing we call the soul.

Ranicar called it his will. His will conquered. The watch on his dressing-table with its tiny blue dangling charm, lay undisturbed until the grey morning light, fading everything it fell on, entered the curtained window, and showed his pale face thrown back on the pillow in uneasy slum-

ber. A sleep so short and unrefreshing, that it seemed to have wearied the brain more than rested it, when he awoke.

For the present he was safe. But what is the present? Only a knife-edge between the past and that which is to come.



CHAPTER IV.

THE ENGAGEMENT BROKEN OFF.

HUNGERFORD stood alone in the tawdry drawing-room of Mrs. Dawnay's abiding-place in Clarges Street, as the clock struck twelve.

“A noble passion misnamed pride,” taught him what words he should use, and banished from his face all disfiguring traces of passion or emotion. He stood leaning one elbow on the mantel-piece, drawing one end of his long moustache through his fingers. His eyes were fixed absently on a blackly executed engraving of the monarch

who was so blackly executed, going to his death. The expression of the Royal Martyr was not unlike his own.

So Susie found him on entering the room. Her poor white face was full of suffering. Her lips trembled, her eyes were dull with the tears she had shed, and the heavy sleep she had lain in the night through.

She sank on a round ottoman opposite him, without any greeting whatever to him, and looked dumbly up into his austere face.

She had known as she came down stairs what she intended to say to him, but the words had gone to the Hades of other failures in deed and word.

It was he who spoke first.

“My dear child,” he said, with a weary calmness, and only shifting his position so that he could look her more fully in the face, “I have come here hoping that you will waste no emotion on me, that you will spare me the sight of your childish, but to

me painful, agitation. Perhaps I may be able to help you in what you wish to do and say."

Susie's face became "as the face of a clock from which the hands have been taken." She had so little knowledge of the world and the men thereof, that she was taken aback by the elevated composure and self-control of the man of whose love for herself she felt sure.

After waiting a moment for her to speak, he went on :

"You gave me back your ring last night. You wish to break off your engagement to me, do you not?"

Susie faltered out something disparaging of herself, and complimentary to him.

"Too 'clever' and 'old' and 'grand' for you, am I?" he said, with a slight smile, guessing at what she said. "I think I must refuse to allow you to throw me over on those scores. I am neither too

clever, too old, nor"—laughing a little scornfully—"too *grand* for you."

He repeated the word as one repeats the mis-pronounced word of a baby.

Susie began to cry.

For a moment he had a strong impulse to seat himself beside her, and draw the handkerchief away from her eyes, pleading, with all the fire and passion that underlay his cold exterior, for the love and promises he craved. But he resisted it, keeping the same position, and waiting patiently for her to control herself sufficiently to speak.

She was not one of the sort of people whose tears are irrepressible. In a moment she looked up.

"I feel at such a disadvantage," she said, with frank humility, "to sit here and cry! for what? I cannot tell. Yes, I do wish my freedom back. I wish everything to be at an end between us. There seems to be a barrier between us. It has been like

trying to kiss a person through an iron grating, this struggle I have made to love you."

An ungovernable contraction of pain passed over his features. He turned his face away for an instant, affecting to feel the heat of the fire too strongly.

Susie took advantage of the motion to breathe on her handkerchief, and press it to her eyes, to take away the traces of tears.

"I am very sorry," she continued, more bravely, feeling that she looked less abject. "Do not be angry with me."

"Angry ! Not in the least. You should have told me this before ; but I do not blame you. Now that I think of it, you have never said one sweet, caressing word, such as you would say if you cared for a man, yet you meant to mislead me, did you not ? You promised to marry me from other motives than those of love and pre-

ference, but you were not unwilling to let me think that you loved me?"

She only murmured, "Do forgive me."

"I have told you already that I do not blame you," he said, in the same cold tone; "so of course that precludes my having anything to forgive. Your mother knows of this?"

"Yes; she says she is disappointed in me," answered Susie, simply.

Disappointed in her! But *was* he disappointed in her? She had wrung his heart, stabbed his self-love with a poisoned blade, robbed him of his ewe lamb of trust in woman-kind, destroyed his peace of mind and his happiness, deprived him of his hopes and dreams and fond imaginings of the future; but could he honestly say that being *disappointed* in her expressed what he felt, as he looked at her innocent, dismayed face, and watched her trembling fingers nervously twisting and untwisting

the handkerchief, tear-bedewed because of her self-reproach and dislike of giving him pain.

Some women would have made their want of love for him no plea for giving him up, but, keeping well before their mind's eye his enviable, coveted accessories, would have walked to the altar with him, and sold themselves to him right willingly, leaving the devastation of his life until *afterwards*.

Ranicar was not too lenient in his estimation of women. He stepped forward suddenly, and seated himself beside Susie.

"Tell me," he said, with the suspicion of a thrill in his voice, "would you not have cared for me under any circumstances?"

"How do you mean?" faltered she, trying to meet his eyes, but failing.

"I cannot expect you to catch half-expressed meanings, of course. I mean, that if one who is totally different from me in age, appearance, character, *motif*, had not

been continually offering himself as a contrast to me, you would have loved me, perhaps?"

For the first time since she had come into the room, Susie's face flushed ; flushed until it burnt.

He was answered most eloquently ; it would have been useless for her tongue to attempt contradicting what her face affirmed.

She believed that he muttered a word or two under his breath, which instinctively she knew to be terrible ; not to be spoken aloud ; not fit to enter the ears of a girl like herself.

" I imagined," she said, humbly, " that I should find a great deal in self-defence to say to you this morning. I don't know where all my thoughts and words have flown, I am sure. But I feel now that you can think for me and understand me, without my having to say any more. I shall

never forget how kind, how *gentle* you have been to-day——”

It was in her mind to say, “Can you have cared for me so very much after all, to be so cool?” but she broke off there, leaving it unsaid.

“What did you expect me to do?” and his voice now passed beyond his control, and became broken and harsh. “What did you expect me to do? Forget my age, my experience, my hardly-earned knowledge that life is only a phantom-chase, and act like a man on the stage when he tries to show his audience what mental agony is like? Why should you be shown what sort of thing the suffering of a man is? No, you shall never learn from me. Besides, you are never to know whether I *have* suffered through—this—or whether I have not. There is nothing more for you to do, say, or feel, as regards me, Susie, but to shake hands, bid me good-bye, and

remember me as one who will always be your friend."

"I—I almost wish you would scold me," she stammered; "I am quite accustomed to being scolded; I would not break down—you need not spare me so; it crushes me; it makes me more wretched than all the angry things would that I had fancied you would say to me. Ah, this shows the gulf between us! That I was not able in the least to imagine how you would act and speak this morning."

"There is a disparity between us, but this does not prove it. Will you shake hands with me again? for after to-day I shall make it a point to lose sight of you, and your career, for ever." These last words were spoken bitterly.

Susie readily placed her small cold hand in his; and her heart ached dully. She would, then, never see him again! He intended to lose sight of her for ever.

“You said that you would be my friend, I thought?” she whispered.

“So I will be, if you need one. But I shall not be on the watch to offer you my friendship. If you require it, and let me know that you do, it shall be at your service. Good-bye. You are the last woman whose hand I shall kiss. It has been a cruel enough hand to me. The little thumb should be turned down, for there has been no mercy shown me.”

He bent downwards the thumb of the hand he held, and kissed it. Then he was gone. And Susie sat alone.

She felt something as a man might who has got rid of a painful limb by amputation. The pain is gone, certes, but the useful member has gone with it! There was a sense of loss, which she told herself was the knowledge of her regained freedom.

Now she was at liberty to listen to

another man's wooing, and to bestow her love on whomsoever she chose.

Pleasurable as this thought was, it was so steeped in uncertainty that she hardly dared harbour it.

Listlessly and slowly she got up, and went to her mother; sinking down into a chair with a dejected droop of head and hands.

Mrs. Dawnay looked earnestly at her daughter. The glance was an interrogative one, but she did not accompany it by a question. She was polishing her pink filbert nails when Susie came in; now she laid aside the box, and sat waiting for her daughter to speak.

"He says," said Susie, suddenly, and raising her head, "that he shall make it a point to lose sight of me for ever."

"He is quite right," said Mrs. Dawnay, "he will probably learn to forget you, if he is not reminded of you in any way. It

was a pity that you went through with this farce of engaging yourself to him, both for his sake and your own. It would have been far better if you could have known your own mind——”

Susie, with a gloomy frown on her face, sprang up, cutting her mother short, and rushing from the room to her own, shut the door and locked herself in for a long disappearance.

Her room was a small one at the front of the house. How the hours dragged. How her heart beat and hungered, and sank and failed, as knocks sounded at the door which meant nothing for her ; voices came up faintly, and feet ascended the stairs that never stopped at her door.

She was all unaccustomed to tension and suspense. She wearied herself out with her own impatience.

He would come. He must come ! Another night would not draw on without her

seeing him. He ought, at least, to call on her mother—her mother, whom he thought so charming.

The story that never grows old !

He did not come. Another night drew on, and she had not seen him.

Mrs. Dawnay, who had a pleasure-loving temperament, had arranged to go to the theatre with the Willises that night. She came rustling upstairs a little before dinner-time, and tried the handle of her daughter's door. She had been up at luncheon-time without gaining admittance or a reply.

“ You are going to the theatre to-night, Susie. Are you not dressed, or dressing, love ? ”

Susie unlocked and opened the door, and stood blinking at the candle Mrs. Dawnay held.

There was a great contrast between the mother and daughter as they stood there. Mrs. Dawnay in blue silk and black lace,

with smooth golden hair; Susie in a dress that looked as if it had been through a war, her dark hair in one-sided, unbecoming confusion, her eyelids swollen, her face pale.

“I can’t go,” she said.

Mrs. Dawnay entered. “Oh, do come, Susie, and while you dress I will sit here, and you shall tell me what you have been thinking about all these long hours shut up here.”

“I can tell you in one word—myself.  I can’t go to the theatre. Look at me!”



CHAPTER V.

ALAS ! HOW HARDLY THINGS GO RIGHT.

THE guineas that had poured in so lavishly when Léontine, her beauty and her mystic trade, were novelties, as time wore on dwindled sadly. Every day now the number of her *clientèle* diminished, and applications to the uncle and niece to come to private houses and séances, as they had formerly done, there were absolutely none. People were tired of them. This waning of success and popularity Léontine met with absolute indifference. But Mr. Van Vleck became

like a wild cat in a tree with a fire below.

“Do you know, Léon,” he said one night, with a venomous sound in his voice, “what we are on the point of *evoking*?—ha! ha!”

“No,” answered Léontine, looking up from a dictionary she had been studying nearly all day; “what?”

“Ruination. We must turn to and do something to prop up our falling fortunes, or by the living Jingo we shall have to tribulate a heap. You’re not the sort of lady to tribulate, Léon. I thought, perhaps, when I got hold of you, that you’d bring me good luck, for I’ve brought myself the worst luck going, always. ‘If my father had made me a hatter, men would have been born without heads.’ That’s my proverb. I don’t want it, thank you, but I’ve been obliged to appropriate it. Put down that dictionary and listen to me. What are you trying to find for the land’s

sake, that you've been buried in it all day?"

"I have been finding in it a very strong proof of the wickedness of the world. Do you know how many more words there are with wicked meanings than with good meanings? That shows how many more wicked things there are to be expressed in language. How can we be good——"

"Don't talk such confounded nonsense," said Mr. Van Vleck, angrily, and snatching the book away from her. "Look here—listen. I've got an opening for you that promises—well, I can't say loaves and fishes—fish-bones, and bread crumbs—it's the stage. Not quite dumb, leggy parts; some better than that; and there's such a verb as to climb, you know."

"Don't, or you will give me a crisis of nerves!" said Léontine, ruffling her dead-black hair until she looked Medusa-like.

"But I must give a decided answer to

Barblock to-morrow morning early. One of his girls has failed him ; broken a blood-vessel, or something."

"Very well," said Léontine, with burning eyes and a steel-trap-like suddenness ; "tell him 'yes,' but don't promise for any definite time, Uncle Aloysius. That won't do ; can't do—*shan't* do."

There fell a significant silence between the pair.

Eugene Everard came, as usual, and was made to notice a depression and gloom in the manner of both uncle and niece.

He looked searchingly at Léontine, trying to divine what her secret trouble was ; but he was powerless to read the face of a woman whose mind was a very Memphis of dark and tortuous and secret labyrinths, and went baffled back to his bachelor quarters in Tenterden Street.

And so it fell out that Léontine became enrolled with a *corps de théâtre*.

She had not to dance, or sing, or to speak much, or indeed do anything but dress herself in the costume appointed her, and, with a dozen or fifty others like herself, walk lightly on to the chalked boards, with the footlights glaring up into her eyes, and a confused phantasmagoria of faces in front of her, which at first she was afraid to look at.

Sometimes she had airy skirts, light and white as foam of the sea. Sometimes it was all close-fitting silk or satin ; a spear, and a burnished shield, heavy to look at, and light to hold.

Sometimes she lay hidden in the petals of a great flower. Sometimes she was hung in mid-air, half blinded by rose-coloured light ; or she sailed over wooden water in a one-sided boat, or she flapped a mock-scaly tail on painted rocks ; or, booted and spurred, and armed with a pointless sword, strode up and down, the servi-

tor of a golden-haired, silver-voiced cavalier.

And Eugene speedily knew what she had become.

He saw her beautiful as a hasheesh eater's vision ; "stately as a deer with antlers, pliant as a wand of willow," and he heard men whose judgment was infallible, and who were as chary of praise as they were of charity, finding no words too strong to express her beauty and inimitable grace. One man went so far as to pronounce her to be perfection ; and that man was Ranicar Hungerford.

What Eugene felt for her now, dominated every consideration of prudence, worldly wisdom, discretion, self-interest. The time separating him from her grew to seem longer and longer, until it became magnified into a duration that could not be lived through with anything like patience. The spring of his watch got limp and inefficient,

he opened and shut it so many times a day to count the minutes dividing him from her. He was caught in the racing rapids of passion, and they hurried him on, their clamour drowning the faint voices of self-restraint and disapproval, which tried to draw him back.

Léontine had been on the stage a week or more, when, as he glanced about the theatre (of course, he was there every night) he saw in one of the boxes Susie and her mother, and two other people, strangers to him.

He had not been to the Willises since the night he dined there with Susie; and that poor little maiden he had not set eyes on once since then. But he had learnt from some outside source that her engagement with Ranicar Hungerford was off. Ranicar himself was knocking about town, gay to make one shudder.

When Eugene heard of Susie's engage-

ment being broken, exultation warred with self-reproach. It seemed rather an empty satisfaction, after all, to have plundered Hungerford, if he really *had* plundered him, which he was doubtful of. On the other hand, it was an agreeable consciousness to him, that of having had the power to draw Susie away, and fix her preference on himself.

A cruel curiosity prompted him to leave his place between the acts, and go to where Susie sat, quiet and pale, and exchange greetings with her and her mother.

"I must apologize with the deepest abasement for not having called," he said to the widow; "I have intended to, every day since I heard you were here. I am awfully ashamed of myself. You have been up about ten days, I think? *Where are you?*"

With admirably feigned graciousness, Mrs. Dawney told him, and Susie, watch-

ing his careless smile, with a heart that felt crushed in a vice, smiled back at him, said a score of gay nothings, opened and shut her fan with pretty girlish grace, and wondered why she had thought that nothing could be harder to bear than the tormenting restlessness and weary waiting of the past fifteen days, when there was such a thing as *this* still to be borne.

The merry measure that the orchestra was playing sounded dismal to her as the cry of a baited animal.

The commonplaces she uttered ranged themselves among the bitter memories of her life, to be remembered in after times, when the few wise or witty things she ever had said were totally forgotten by her.

The curtain drew up, disclosing the peach-blossom coloured legs, and gilded hair, and darkened eyes of a dozen or more girl cavaliers. Above the rest towered a lithe

and perfect form, booted and spurred, rapier at side jingling as she walked ; dark curling hair, long piercing dark eyes, Attic features,—a superb embodiment of a wild and restless spirit.

Susie, with an exclamation of surprise, snatched the opera-glass rudely enough from Mrs. ——, whom they had come with, and looked eagerly through it.

“ Mr. Everard,” she said, in a voice trembling with excitement, “ that tall, dark girl, so magnificently dressed in grey velvet slashed with crimson, is Miss Médor, the Medium !”

“ It is remarkably like her,” he replied, smiling with an effort.

“ Remarkably like her ! Alice said that she had been quite eclipsed by another American Medium ; a little fair thing, who does monstrous feats of trickery and memory. I should think she had found her level now. She was born to be an actress.

See how well she manages her sword and spurs !”

He made no reply, but there was a look of angry mortification in his face that she wished away with all her heart.

“ You have not seen my cousin Alice for some time,” she said, hesitatingly ; and to propitiate him, looking away from the stage, as if there were no such creature as Léontine Médor upon it.

“ No,” he replied carelessly ; “ I have not seen her for a week—a month—something of that sort. Why !”

“ I merely asked for the sake of saying something,” she answered, taking up the glass again.

She longed for him to go ; she longed for him to stay ; her hands trembled, her lips and throat were dry. An awkward pause fell between them ; then Susie, with a quiet bravery, crushed back all emotion, laughed with a sob in her throat ; talked

gaily out of the abundance of a suffering heart.

“No captives so uncomforted
As souls behind a smile.”

The curtain fell on another act ; Eugene, with a perfect knowledge of what dazzling vision was waiting for him behind the scenes, shook hands, said good night, and left the box ; making his way to those wrong side of the tapestry precincts of the theatre, where he found his lovely Cavalier talking to Ranicar Hungerford, who had not been visible in stall or box.

A feeling such as he had never experienced before came over Eugene. It was raging jealousy, mingled with the sense of actually having no grace, or gift, or possession, to outweigh those of Ranicar. Yes ; bitter, nauseous as the conviction was, it was incontrovertible ; as the world saw them, Ranicar was the more enviable man

of the two ; Ranicar could grasp what he could only touch, Ranicar perhaps had it in his power to supplant him ; the thought maddened him ; stung him to the very core. He stood still for a moment to recover himself, and to watch the pair, hoping to be unobserved. But Ranicar's eyes, languid-lidded though they were, were sharp, and he spied Eugene amongst the confused crowd of scene-shifters, call-boys, stage-carpenters, coryphées. The uncontrollable look of wrathful misery that swept over Eugène's face did not escape him. He was confused by no conflicting surmises. He came to an instant conclusion as to what was passing in the other's mind.

Two lips scarlet by nature, not art, parted to speak flatteringly to him ; two liquid, dark eyes raised to send shafts of light into his own ; a sinuous form, posed in studied grace so near to him that he could have touched the glittering baldrick, helped him

to the decision that, as he had once feared Eugene Everard, so Eugene Everard had now every reason to fear him.

For an instant he felt overwhelmed by a great, revengeful joy. The foretaste of vindictive satisfaction was like new wine. To dash the cup away from his lips, or to drink till the base metal was left dry? Which should it be?

Each sense received a never-to-be-forgotten impression, and its master, the brain, absorbed it unconsciously in those moments of indecision. There came sougning fitfully in the notes of the orchestra; a confused, deadened hub-bub of voices. Snatches of the talk going on about him.

“ Handsome is that handsome does, you know Sir George.”

“ Pardon, we have changed that; handsome is that handsome *looks*.”

“ Pretty? Lillabelle pretty? She has no more features than a split muffin!”

“The great thing, is to be allowed to take life in our own way, instead of being bullied into taking it in other people’s way.”

There was the smell of escaped gas.

There were figures for footlights and the enchantment of distance. The make up and tarnish incident to those who tread the boards being very visible here. Forms masculinely attired, to look more feminine : a very little sprite being led away limping and blubbering. Eugene advancing, the suavity of his face changed to Satanism.

“You never took any notice of me then ; you never used to look at me,” Léontine was saying, her voice vibrating for him as it vibrated for Eugene, her face eager with expectation, charged with enticing meaning.

“It would be more charitable of you not to remind me of a time when my taste was so bad. Perhaps,” he added with studied flattery, “I felt that it was safer not to ex-

pose myself to fascinations which are now proving so dangerous to my peace of mind that I am forced to run away from them."

He held out his hand.

"Good-night and good-bye," he said.

The self-conquest was gained, and it is strange that forty centuries of civilization do not make it easier than it is for the individual result of that soft, harmonizing process to subdue the instincts of the barbarian, the uncultured delights of revenge and exultation over a worsted foe.

Ranicar had perhaps more the religious idea than his neighbours, yet he told himself that this relinquishing of moral loot was the work of his own will solely.

"Good-night and good-bye?" repeated Léontine, her long eyes seeming to lengthen as the lids drooped over them, the corners of her mouth falling for disappointment.

"Are you going away from London?"

"Yes," he said, in as low a tone as he

could use, and yet be audible. "I am going away ; you don't know what it costs me."

He said good-night to her again, and left her—her face, with its look of defeated expectation, and Eugene's, with its look of foretasted defeat distinctly photographed on his mind.

He made his way out, and got a hansom.

"Where to, sir?" asked the man.

"Out of England," said Hungerford, between his teeth, clapping the door together with a resounding bang.

The man stared, but waited quietly for a more definite direction to be given to him. He was not particularly astounded ; he had had as queer things said to him before, especially by people coming out of the theatre.



CHAPTER VI.

ALICE ON INQUIRIES.

“**Y**OU have quite forgotten my existence, I believe,” said Alice Willis, seating herself on the ottoman beside her cousin, and speaking with an aggrieved air.

“It would take me longer than a week to do that,” answered Susie, smiling faintly. “I have meant to come—but—but something has always prevented me.”

Yes; and always the same something—dread of her cousin’s flippantly cruel tongue.

“Now if you had been taken up with Mr. Hungerford, I could have understood it,” continued Alice. “There cannot be much expected from an engaged girl; but since you are just as free as I am, I think you might have come a little sooner, especially as I have been here a great many times, and always found you out. You don’t look well, Susie. You look as if an artistic coal-heaver had touched up your eyes with the end of his finger. You’re fretting because you’ve broken it off, and now you wish you hadn’t.”

“No,” replied Susie, indignantly; “I am doing nothing of the sort. Please don’t talk of what you don’t understand, Alice.”

“Well, I acknowledge that I never *could* understand what made you two people engage yourselves to each other, unless it was affinity. (By the way, we have had some splendid séances with little Milly King.) But what made you break it off?

Aunt Margaret told mamma that it *was* you who broke it, not he."

"Alice," said Susie, inwardly writhing, "do not let us talk about it now. Some other time we will. Let us talk about *you*. What have you been doing since I saw you last? Tell me more about the séances and Milly King. Is she really so much more wonderful than Léontine Médor?"

"Oh, much more," said Alice, and Susie, with all her pre-occupation, could not help noticing that her cousin's face grew white, and then flushed crimson.

"They are quite given up—that girl and her uncle, Mr. Van Vleck. No one has them now, and the girl has become an actress."

"I know it," rejoined Susie; "we saw her the other night. Do you ever see Mr. Everard now, Alice?" Her heart beat violently as she asked the question.

"No," said Alice, curtly, the corners of

her mouth going down, and her eyebrows up. "Do you?"

"The last time I saw him was that night at the theatre when I saw Miss Médor."

"I really got quite tired of him and his soft speeches," said Alice, imitating her mother's strong-minded manner. "I think he saw it. Once wound a man's *amour propre*, and there is the end of his liking for you. Or, to reverse it, let a man once wound severely a woman's vanity, and he has an enemy."

"No," said Susie, shaking her head; "I don't think it works both ways; and an enemy means a person who is willing to do an injury; there are very few people, I think, willing to deliberately injure one of their fellow human-beings."

Alice moved the toe of her boot slowly along the carpet, following it with her eyes. She did not speak for a moment; then she said, in her own flippant tones—

“One person has one way of being naughty, another has another; and one person thinks the other’s way the naughtiest because it is not *their* way; but that doesn’t prove that it *is* the naughtiest. We all have a bag of sins on our backs. Every wrong that we do must injure either ourselves or somebody else, and it is just as important that we should not injure ourselves as that we should not injure our neighbours; and people are doing wrong things all the time, so that we are all of us each other’s enemy or our own.”

“Ah, but not willingly,” said Susie.

“Yes, willingly,” repeated Alice, irritably, “because we don’t do things with our eyes shut; we know what we are about——”

“No, we don’t,” interrupted Susie, quickly.

“And what is an injury?” said Alice, harping on the theme. “A man, becoming a bankrupt, and losing every penny, is in-

jured either by his fate or a swindler or something : at least, he would be called injured, but it may be the making of him. He may be ten times the man that he was before. Then, in some other case, a man who has acted like a donkey gone mad, may be made to see what a fool he has been, by some outside person taking a little trouble to have him given a round, sound disappointment or something, to make him feel a wholesome regret for the past which will do him good. You open your eyes till you look exactly like a white owl, Susie ; don't you understand what I mean ?”

“I understand what you *say*, but I didn't know that you ever thought about such things.”

“I do not, except when I talk of them, and that is about once a year. Come out with me, Susie. I've got the little brougham ; let us have a lark. Mamma thought I was going to bring Miss Wix

with me, but I didn't. She and Aunt Margaret are at the Albert Hall, are they not?"

"Yes. What should you call a lark, Alice?"

"Oh, I don't know; driving down St. James's Street."

"Dear me; I do not see much fun in that. Such a crowd. Let us go into the Park. It is a lovely afternoon; the lime-trees are beginning to look so pretty with their pale green feathers."

"Pale green feathers! Why not their aigrettes à la Shah? I'll come up with you while you put on your bonnet. You have a very pretty bonnet—so Cora says."

"Cora is very observing."

"Cora," said Alice, a tide of crimson rushing into her face, "is a wonderful child, with eyes and ears that ought to have some other name invented for them, to convey the idea of what they really are. Were you not sorry to part with that beautiful, beautiful ring, Susie?"

“No ; my finger feels more natural without it.”

“If you are ever engaged again, you must get your lover to betroth himself to you with a brass curtain-ring, since a handsome jewel is such a care and trial to you ;” and Alice laughed her sharp, trilling laugh, which gave one the idea of heartlessness.

It was a beautiful afternoon. The bright March sunshine seemed apologetically to make a gilding for every gritty, dingy, smoky London thing that it touched. Crocuses were out in the prim park beds ; the Easter holidays were over, and the town was filling fast. A few people had already begun to saunter under the lime-trees.

The two girls in Mrs. Willis’s little brougham whisked into the Stanhope Gate, and a good many eyes peered inquisitively in at their young faces.

Such young girls, and yet with so much already to conceal and to endure, with faces

that, if lines are the superscription of cark and care, were blank to any such dreary testimony.

One man out of at least every six made Susie's heart leap and beat violently. Bright brown hair is very common ; so, fortunately, are a liberal allowance of inches and a generous breadth of shoulders. She saw eighty-six men like Eugene, but she did not see *him* until they were quite round on the Bayswater side of the park. Then she saw him walking slowly along, with Léontine Médor by his side.

The sunshine flooded his face and that of his companion. He was smoking ; taking the cigar out of his mouth to laugh at something his companion said. His white teeth glittered in the gaudy light, and his blue eyes were full of amusement and pleasure.

As Susie in younger days had composed and palpitatingly pronounced a sentence in French, laboriously enunciating each un-

familiar word, so she now said, "If Mr. Everard were in a more independent position, I should think that he was going to marry Léontine Médor."

"Going to marry her!" repeated Alice, with an accent of smothered derision. "But that would be madness, you know, Susie. He has no money of his own; Mr. Everard, his father, died horribly poor; the money was all Mrs. Everard's, and he spent it. As for Sir Alfred Ogle, he's a prim old gentleman, isn't he?"

"Oh, the primmest old gentleman!" said Susie, being in that state of mind when to draw on other people's supply of words is a boon and privilege.

Alice tossed her head back, a light too angry and wicked for mere mischief brightening her eyes.

"Fancy 'the primmest old gentleman' thinking that the nephew he means to make his heir is on the point of marrying a bal-

let dancer who has been a Spiritualistic medium, and is—black! A Creole would be to a prim old gentleman something black-skinned, unless he thought about it, and they don't think much, do they? these old Sir Alfred Ogles' who live in the heart of the country."

"But she isn't a ballet dancer, and she isn't black," said Susie, rousing herself.

"Oh, don't be so literal. You follow my meaning, don't you? You see that I mean it is amusing to imagine the horror, the—is there not some word stronger than horror?—of this dear old gentleman, if he should believe that his nephew was going to be such a madman—worse still, actually had been such a madman—as to marry a *very, very* dark outsider like Miss Médor."

"Oh," said Susie, speaking low, "she is so beautiful! I hope, I pray, that if he is going to marry her, it will not ruin him

with his uncle, if Sir Alfred should hear it. But it would, I fear it would!" and she thought of him as she had just seen him, with the sunlight on his face, and the laughter in his eyes; thought of him with a self-less hope that the sunlight of prosperity should not cease to gild his life. Eugene and disappointment, Eugene and adversity, Eugene and misfortune—it seemed almost impossible to connect his name with those harsh, ill-meaning words.

"It would do him good," muttered Alice, pressing her shoulders back with a writhing motion, into the soft cushions. "Frivolous, flirting fellow! Flirting with me, flirting desperately with you, flirting with everybody, and then showing what a fool he really is by tumbling in love with a wandering adventuress. It makes one angry with one's self to think that one has ever been civil to such an idiot."

Flirting with her! That was the trivial

word then for all that he had made her suffer, thought Susie.

“It would sober him, bring him down, bring him to his senses—if he ever had any,” muttered Alice, brooding over her own real or fancied injuries.

“Sir Alfred will be in town soon,” said Susie. “So mamma says.”

“Susie,” cried Alice, abruptly, and staring at her cousin, “you look wretchedly ill; you ought to take a tonic—you ought to drink ale that has had a hot poker in it. I shall tell Aunt Margaret so.”

“Don’t,” said Susie, imploringly; “it will worry her terribly to think that I do not look well; and I cannot imagine why I do not, for I feel perfectly well.”

But Alice, when she took Susie home, got out herself, and notwithstanding Susie’s frowning intimation to be silent, spoke up, and sent a pang through the widow’s gentle heart.

“Do you think her looking poorly, Alice,” she said anxiously, and giving a mother’s tender, searching glance into Susie’s face. “But she is always pale, you know.”

“Yes, Aunt Margaret; but it was a sort of yellowish pink paleness, and now it is a white white, almost a *blue* white; or it was a little while ago.”

“Pray hush,” cut in Susie, “you make me feel ill, describing me as if I were a rainbow. You are doing it to teaze me; you know you are.”

“Oh no, I’m not,” returned Alice, with her bird-like laugh; “I was only frank, and I know how you value frankness, you are so frank yourself. Good-bye, dear Aunt Margaret; ta-ta, Susan.” And Alice tripped down-stairs, and was taken home.

“But you feel well, Susan?” asked Mrs. Dawnay, in palpable distress of mind.

“Perfectly well,” answered Susie positively. Then after a pause, “we—we met

Mr. Everard this afternoon ;” and now one could accuse her cheeks of whiteness. “He was walking with the Creole, Miss Médor ; I showed her to you at the theatre one night you know. He has quite given up our acquaintance, mamma.”

The most intense anger that Mrs. Dawnay was capable of stirred her now. How well she understood it all ! And what bitter resentment she felt against the unscrupulous amusement seeker, who had done her daughter the wrong of alienating her from the man whom she had promised to marry, and whom she would have learned to love if it had not been for this too charming scamp.

Mrs. Dawnay at that moment felt herself capable of some large deed of retaliation and reprisal.

She saw her powerless, childish Susie a sufferer, for whom there was but one unattainable cure. And Eugene had ceased to be even civil ; had refrained from the scant

courtesy of a formal call ! Mrs. Dawnay had never had anything of this sort to bear for herself, but it seemed ten times harder to have it to bear for Susie.

“ I am sorry that you ever saw him,” she said, with a shaking voice ; “ I regret the day that found him in our little drawing-room ; I wish from my soul that he had never come. You would not have broken your engagement if it had not been for him, my child.”

Susie did not reply ; but something in her truthful face answered her mother, and silenced her too. There was a long pause between them. The fire darted out gleams of light, and sullenly withdrew them. The ashes fell softly ; the twilight stealthily stole on ; a star or two crept out, and “ trembled forlorn.”

Susie, dragging herself up from her low chair, went nearer the window, and looking into the lane of sky between the houses,

watched a bright shivering world above her. She wondered whether it carried a great burthen of troubled hearts, and sick souls, and suffering bodies. To distract her mind from herself and her troubles, Susie launched out into speculations as to the function of that sphere, which to her was but a dot of light with the ague.

“Still sitting in the dark?” said Mrs. Dawnay, who had gone out of the room, and had now come back.

“Yes,” answered Susie; “I am thinking of a star-story to tell the children. ‘That is *my* star, see him wink at me,’ said Lucy, the other night. I have been making up a story. It is rather fun. It keeps one from thinking of other things;” she sighed.

A look of pain crossed Mrs. Dawnay’s face; to be succeeded by one of cold, and fixed determination.



CHAPTER VII.

SIR ALFRED COMES TO CONQUER.

WHEN the primrose began to thrust up its round, moonshiny face ; when the violet modestly (what would become of the modesty of the violet could it but know the proud position it occupies among similes) freed itself from the embrace of earth, and hid itself shamefaced under its own green leaves ; when his fields were full of emblems of innocence, capering, baaing, frisking about their dams, Sir Alfred Ogle, leaving behind

him yards of instructions, and the rustic freshness of the young spring time, came up from his island home to the busy town.

He waited the shortest possible time before paying his respects to the worshipped widow, whom he found at home alone ; writing, with jet daisies in her golden hair, and countless jet beads hanging on her symmetrical shoulders. She rose to meet him with a more effusive warmth of manner than it is advisable to show to a hopeless aspirant. There had been signs of trouble in the good gentleman's face when he entered the room, but beneath this geniality of manner they vanished, as the inequalities of wax vanish under glow of sunbeams.

Mrs. Dawney still sat at the writing-table, but turned away from it ; her elbow resting on it, her long white fingers pressed against one of the jet daisies in her hair.

A few of the questions that are worn

threadbare were asked and answered. A few isolated remarks were made on each side that called for no reply.

A pause came. Mrs. Dawney's blue-veined hand moved softly from the daisy to the beads. Her large eyes drooped; her lips were softly, sweetly, suggestively mute.

Sir Alfred drew a little nearer to her and then the conversation sprung up again; becoming more earnest, more low-toned, more and more removed from the general and the commonplace, more and more closely allied to the personal and the profoundly interesting.

It was three by the clock when Sir Alfred entered the room, it was past five when he left it.

At the street door, just returned from a ride, he encountered Susie, whom he assisted with great alacrity to alight.

He had quite a gallant and rejuvenated

air, Susie thought ; and here in town in smart clothes and a tall hat, bore a look of distinction, and old-time stiff grace, that had either not been, or had not been observed by her, down in the country ; and which was a far more agreeable exemplification of gentlemanhood than that of half the men she met, who, she often thought, looked merely the embodiment of some new slang word.

“ You have been calling on mamma, I suppose, Sir Alfred,” said she, standing for a moment on the pavement beside him, after she had shaken hands with him, and told him she was glad to see him.

“ Yes ; I have been paying my respects to Mrs. Dawnay——”

He spoke in a less measured and methodical way than Susie had ever heard him, and there were a remarkable life and animation in his eyes.

Catching up her habit, and tucking her

whip under her arm, she shook hands with him again in farewell and went into the house.

She entered the drawing-room. Two chairs stood vis-à-vis, very near together. A half-written letter had fluttered down from the writing-table to the floor. The room was empty.

Susie, who always followed her mother about the house, immediately betook herself to the widow's room.

Mrs. Dawnay was standing looking at herself in the glass, an occupation which surprised Susie very much, as she was neither smoothing her hair or arranging her beads, but gazing at her own face without any excuse for doing so.

She turned as Susie entered.

"I met Sir Alfred, as I came in; how young and frisky he seems——" began Susie, and then she became conscious of wondering what the look she saw in her

mother's face was going to be when put into words.

"Susie," said Mrs. Dawnay, seating herself on the edge of the bed, and drawing her daughter down beside her, "I have a piece of news for you, my dear, and I think I prefer telling it to you without any preparation or smoothing of the way. I have promised to marry Sir Alfred Ogle."

Susie seized, and convulsively pressed her mother's hand ; then she sat looking at her with the stony, expressionless gaze that eyes have when the brain is filled full of a surprise which comes through the medium of the hearing faculty. Startling news when read, never gives the eyes the same blank stare that the same intelligence will, sent brainwards through the ears.

"You know best, mamma, what to do," she said at last, in faint, trembling tones, and leaning forward, pressed her cold lips against her mother's cheek.

Could it be that her life had ever held a time when she earnestly wished that this would happen which had happened; that her mother should tell her that she intended to marry Sir Alfred Ogle?

“You are glad, Susie?”

“Oh! yes; I am glad.” But her words sounded to herself as if her ears were filled with water. “And when are you to be—married?”

The last word was spoken with a dolefulness that was a forerunner of the tears that rushed to her eyes. “Oh! mamma, mamma!” she cried; “will you be what you were before to me, after—that? Will you be as much *my mother* as Sir Alfred Ogle’s wife?”

“Susie! How can you say such a cruel thing to me as that? I shall be ten times a happier mother, for shall I not be able to give you everything that before I have only longed hopelessly to give you? He is kind

and generous beyond any man I have ever seen ; he has the truest courtesy, the rarest delicacy——”

Susie thought guiltily of how she had spoken of him to her Cousin Alice, as “ the primmest old gentleman !” Well, fortunately there was nothing vilifying in the term. “ I wish he had taken a greater fancy to me,” she murmured ; “ I wish I had been a more taking, popular sort of girl. But you have not told me yet, mamma, when—when——”

“ I do not know myself yet,” replied the widow, flushing slightly ; “ and you are glad, Susie ?”

“ Yes ; glad.”

“ Really ?”

“ Yes ; really. Why a year ago I should have clapped my hands, danced, disturbed all the furniture in the room, and broken accidentally some of your scent bottles, for joy.”

She roused herself, as we all can, and do, by the stirring sound of her own words. "No more love in a cottage for us," she went on, with increasing animation, "no more broken bubbles, no more being at sea in a bowl ! we've done with all that. I'm tired ; the chords under my knee ache."

A rapid transition from the gaiety of the pleasure-loving girl to the fretful despondency of the child.

"Go then, and take off your habit, dear, I think I have acted for your happiness and for my own ; and for dear, good Sir Alfred's."



CHAPTER VIII.

EUGENE AND LÉONTINE.

ONE evening, at about nine o'clock, Eugene Everard's footstep sounded along the passage of No. —, Swanburg Crescent, and in a moment Eugene himself entered the room where Léontine sat alone.

"I have had an awful time of it since I saw you last," he said, releasing her from his arms ; " my uncle has come up to town, and hasn't he sold me ! He is going to be married. Yes, he, the old dog, is going to marry, at sixty, Mrs. Dawnay, the hand-

somest widow since Dido. And Léon, this is not all. *He knows what I've done.* Some infernal mischief-maker has written him an anonymous letter with the literal truth in it——”

“Little Dawnay!” cried Léontine, with glittering eyes.

“No,” he replied, frowning; “never. She would as soon think of chopping off my head as of injuring me in that under-hand way. She no more wrote it than I wrote it myself. That little cat, her cousin, with her caught up eyebrows, is capable of any such malicious trick—so are a good many other women I know—I think she hates me.” He shrugged his shoulders. “A fellow need only be barely civil to a girl, and he is misunderstood. I was born to be civil to women, especially when they are young; and I believe I must have been born to be misunderstood, too. Miss Alice Willis, perhaps, was born to make mischief

and write anonymous letters. I don't think she's fit for anything much better. There's no tracing a letter of that sort to its source. But it would be a sweet moment to me if I ever chanced to find the writer! I'm done for! He showed me the letter, and in the most hopelessly cold, well-expressed sentences, assured me of his profound abhorrence of my conduct, and his irrevocable resolution to have nothing more to do with me. I should have been quite pleased if he had bawled and raved at me; but he was in too deadly earnest for that, I can assure you. Is it all definitely arranged with Barblock?"

"Yes; I have been before the foot-lights for the last time."

The shadow of a great anxiety passed over his face. To hide it, he bent down and drew one of the long hanging plaits of her hair half carelessly, half caressingly, through his hand.

“ Was everything in that letter ?” she asked.

“ Everything.”

“ And you did not deny it to your uncle ?”

“ No ; I did not.”

She stamped her foot furiously, the motion being as unlike Susie’s pettish stamp, as a kitten closing its retractile claws on a ball of wool is unlike a panther’s lacerating gripe of an antelope.

“ Why didn’t you ?”

“ I am not clever at telling lies. It is easier to act a lie than to speak one, I have always found.”

“ Every man must tell *one* lie in his lifetime ; that could have been your one lie.”

“ Léon——”

“ But if I have been the cause of your ruin. How could whoever it was have known—found out ?”

“Come,” he said, laughing, although his heart was heavy and sore, “the idea of your asking *me*. Can’t you go off into a trance, and get some of your spirit-friends to tell you?”

“I wish I could,” she returned, drawing in her breath with such force that her thin nostrils were puffed out. “Do you know, I feared that little Dawnay,” she continued, exhaling the breath with a sigh, and laying her hand on his.

“Did you really? She is not in the least pretty.”

“No ; but she has *ways*. They are as winning as a pretty face. Eugene, you were *épris* with her ways, you know you were, a little.”

“No ; I was not. She amused me, that was all ; and it was capital to be able to show Hungerford that he was not a ‘*model fascinator*,’ as your uncle would say. He had such an insufferable air always of re-

membering how he looked, and what his name was, and how much he had a year. What a pretty girl his sister was! Well, he has lost Susie; she was too whole-souled a little thing to make a marriage of expedience."

"Strange that such a man as him should have fallen in love with her."

"I don't think it was strange. I beg you won't say as *him*, Léon, it makes me shiver. Do remember—love." The final word was thrown in to sweeten what otherwise would have been a somewhat acid speech.

"You do not think it was? You contradict yourself finely, then."

"Pardon—I do not. I am gifted with the power of imagining why other men may do certain things; men who are not of my way of thinking. Little Susie Dawnay was as different from him as a 'twinkle, twinkle little star' from an eruption of

Mount Vesuvius, as a butterfly from a bat, as a flake of snow from a cinder, as a drop of water from a drop of blood—and in her difference lay her great charm to him, of course ; don't you see ? I thought women had so much penetration."

"They never have enough penetration to find out why men kneel to the ugliest, bow to the stupidest, and kiss the one nobody else can see why they love the best."

"But Susie is not absolutely ugly, and certainly not stupid ; there is no reason on earth why a man should not choose her to love her the best."

Léontine's face took on the peculiar lowering expression that only jealousy gives.

"*Susie*," she repeated in a low, angry voice ; "you say the name as if it had grown familiar to you from saying it over and over again."

"I have said it a good many times."

"To her face ?"

“No ; not to her face,” he replied, with perfect good temper, his love’s dream being still so young that it made him full of toleration and patience. “Honestly, Léontine,” he said, “I thought you had second-sight, or some mysterious faculty that made you able to see into the future and divine things one wanted to know.”

“So I have,” she answered. “Don’t speak to me of it. I hate to remember that I have been a trader on death and futurity.”

She flung one of her long braids around his neck, and holding the end of it, confined him in this silken bondage, which drew his face very near her own.

“If I have been the cause of turning your uncle against you,” she cried, with a passionate self-reproach that was yet selfish. “But how could our secret have been so soon found out, to be made use of? Why did you not say to your uncle that the

letter was a great wicked fable, a wicked, monstrous lie?"

"I have told you once," he answered, coldly, "because I am not a skilful liar, and because I could not deny you, lovely one," he added, more gently. "When Sir Alfred put that letter in my hands and asked, 'Is that true?' I could no more have looked up from the written truth and said, 'Sir, it is a lie; there is not a word of truth in it,' than I could have struck down his head with my stick."

"*I* could," she murmured between her set teeth. "Go on," she said aloud; "what did you say?"

"I said, 'This letter was sent you to ruin me, and it has succeeded, perhaps, for what it contains is true. I did marry Miss Médor, some time medium, some time actress, on the day my unknown friend mentions. I married her because I loved her.' Then I told him, Léon, how awfully handsome and good you were."

“Which he took the liberty of doubting, of course,” interrupted she, with a harsh laugh.

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake let us drop the subject!” he said, irritably. “It was a horrid scene. I’d willingly forget it. I said what I could to conciliate and reconcile him, but he knew that I meant to keep him in the dark as to what I had done, and he looks upon me as a man who is done for. Don’t stamp, Léon ; you know that I should have looked upon myself as done for if you hadn’t married me.”

“No,” she cried, jealously ; “you have loved many times before——”

“But now I adore,” he finished for her, smiling. “Women are as much the root of all evil as money,” he added, changing his sentimental tone to a perfectly matter-of-fact one. “I believe I should soon learn to *hate* women if they served me out in this way.”



CHAPTER IX.

“YET HE ONLY TOLD ME TO-NIGHT !”

WHEN the lease of life has more than half expired, the lessee is inclined to hasten the few joys that remain to him. When the wooer is sixty, and the wooed thirty-five, courtship is soon merged into matrimony. Philandering is a pleasure dearer to the adolescent than the fully matured. The prelude of betrothal is even less patiently endured by sober middle age than by fiery youth, and mutual consent to be partners for life, having less rapture and more reality to

the seasoned man and woman than the crude girl and boy, there is a larger amount of force at hand to put the agreement into effect speedily.

It was very soon understood that Sir Alfred Ogle's courtship was to be a brief one.

Each was master and mistress of his and her own actions.

A maiden sister was the one human being (except Eugene) in the world who had any claim to be made informally acquainted by Sir Alfred with the impending event.

Mrs. Dawnay's relations—none of them very near or dear—were living in Dresden, and the north of Ireland, and they received the intelligence with a cheerful calmness, a courteous carelessness.

Miss Ogle, prompted by a spirit of friendly curiosity, came up to town to be

made acquainted with her brother's future wife.

She was not on particularly intimate terms with Sir Alfred, having spent fifteen years of her life in Madeira; but she was very well regulated in mind, and well endowed with heart, and had a high opinion of affectionate relationships. So up she came, and established herself in a hotel just round the corner.

She was past fifty, but was a very agreeable person to look at. Her abundant hair had in youth been the brightest chestnut, and now, though plentifully sprinkled with grey, was soft and warm in colour still. Her eyes were brown, her complexion fresh, her figure youthful, her teeth white.

When she spoke, the agreeable impression already given received an addition, for she knew how to talk, and how to listen. Her ideas were not like toads, embedded in a rock; they were presented in the

clearest of voices, the most strongly simple of words, and with a rapid fluency that never wearied.

Her opinions were unshakable, but were never offensively insisted on. She would fain have had every one with whom she was brought in contact of the same way of thinking as herself, and up to a certain point she would urge acquiescence, and with painstaking vigour would try to make her representations plausible, but beyond this point she had the discretion never to go. She could not say or feel that people who differed from her were welcome to their own opinions, but they were very welcome, and more than welcome, to hers, that was all.

Gladys was her name.

"Oh," cried Susie, when she first heard it, "how I wish that was my name."

"Do you, my dear?" said Miss Ogle, who had quick ears, and who overheard

her. "I am sure I should be very happy to make it a present to you, if I could."

"Thanks," answered Susie, drawing nearer. "How nice it would be if we could make presents of things that are our very, *very* own, and that we don't like, and somebody else does. I heard someone once say they liked small, turned-up noses. How delighted I should have been to give them mine."

"What? and have gone without one? I think that you would have regretted your generosity."

Susie laughed, and came to the conclusion that Miss Ogle was a nice person, towards whom she felt drawn.

"Perhaps a system of exchange is more what I mean," she said. "For a person who did not like her red hair to give it away to someone who did, and go bald as a billiard ball herself, would never do, of

course. But there might be jolly exchanges made."

"And you would immediately trade off your pretty, pert little turned-up nose, for a long aggressive Roman, with a bump?"

"Yes," said Susie, "of course I should, so that people would look at me, and say, 'How aristocratic!'"

"You are much better as you are, Miss Dawnay, or Susie, as I suppose I had better call you."

"It's very kind of you to say so," rejoined Susie, gratified as to her nose, putting up her hand and feeling its outline, to find out whether she had not perhaps been mistaken in it. "Mamma's nose is perfect, isn't it?"

"Mamma is altogether perfect," said Miss Ogle, with calm truthfulness. "If they are long enough in Paris, my brother wishes to have her portrait painted; he

thinks that there is no portrait painter in England who will do justice——”

“*They!*” interrupted Susie, gaspingly. “How do you mean, *they*? Are they going *alone* together on a wedding tour? Mamma has not said anything about it to me yet;” and she glanced over at her mother, who was sitting in a remote part of the room with Sir Alfred.

“Perhaps they are arranging it now,” said Miss Ogle, following the direction of Susie’s eyes with her own.

Susie’s heart felt up in her throat. That her mother should go away even for a short time without her, had never entered his mind.

“While they are gone,” said Miss Ogle, who had had a long talk with her brother on the subject the night before, “I want you to come down and pay me a visit. Have you ever been in a cathedral town?”

“Never,” answered Susie, very much in

the tone of one who wished it to be understood that "Never" was intended to stretch into the future as well as refer to the past.

"I have a dear old house in the Cathedral Close," said Miss Ogle, in a coaxing voice.

Selfishly speaking, she longed to carry Susie away with her, and brighten her old rooms with the girl's young presence.

"I have not much to offer a child like you in the way of amusement ; but if you will put it on another footing, and feel that you are gratifying the earnest wish and desire of a lonely old maid, perhaps you will incline to come."

"Thanks," said Susie, in a crushed voice. "I have been separated from my mother all the winter ; but if she decides to go without me, I shall be very glad, of course, to accept your kind invitation. And as for *amusement*, you would be surprised to find

how few things I should think amusing. I had much rather be quiet with you, indeed."

At this point some people entered, and no more was said.

As soon as she could possibly manage it, Susie flew at her mother.

"Mother!" she cried, breathlessly, "is it really true that you are going on a tour after you are married? You and Sir Alfred, *alone*?"—dropping her voice, as if she were mentioning something highly improper.

"Sir Alfred has just been speaking to me about it," said the widow, hesitatingly. "His plan is to travel on the Continent for a few weeks while you go down to —— with Gladys, who has taken such a fancy to you."

"And Sir Alfred hasn't," said Susie, bitterly. Then she dropped down with abandonment on the arm of a chair, clasping its back in both of her own arms, while she bedewed its antimacassar with her tears.

“Nobody cares for me,” she said. “Nobody but the one I sent away from me, and he did not much. Sir Alfred is going to tear you away from me.”

“Never,” cried the widow, with something solemn, almost tragic, in her soft thrush voice. “I will give him this one month, and then you and I shall never be parted again. Never any more, unless you leave me for a home of your own.”

She unclasped her daughter’s arms from the chair back, and held her hands in her own.

“You need not fear that I shall make a fuss about it,” said Susie, stoutly. “I like Miss Gladys Ogle; I liked her the first moment I saw her; and I would far rather go with her than be an unwelcome addition to Sir Alfred’s party of ‘one less than three.’ It is perfectly natural, mamma, that he should want to have you all to himself. I can

understand it. You are to tell him, please, that it is all quite settled. His sister has asked me—she asked me just now—and I am quite willing to go. I'm sure I know the Continent by heart !”

“You are a good little thing,” whispered Mrs. Dawney ; “you are the darling of my heart. And after this you shall never be separated from me. What shall I bring you from Paris ?”

Susie dried her eyes, chased the angry and tumultuous thoughts from her heart, and answered promptly and decidedly—

“Bring me a pair of ear-rings, made of lapis lazuli balls and fine chains of gold, if you can get them.”

“I will,” said Mrs. Dawney ; “I'll bring you ear-rings and brooch, a necklace, too, of lapis lazuli balls hung on little gold chains.”

They were to dine with Miss Ogle and

her brother at their hotel round the corner, and each departed to her room to dress.

Alice, too, was to dine with Miss Ogle. They found her there when they entered the room. Mrs. Willis had declined, owing to an inspirational discourse which was to be delivered at her house that night by Miss Milly King.

After dinner Alice, Susie, and Miss Ogle played *béziq*ue, while Sir Alfred and Mrs. Dawnay, after watching them for a little while, seated themselves nearer the fire, and were soon absorbed in a low-toned, earnest conversation.

On her mother's rising to say good-night, Susie was struck by her expression. She had never seen a look in the least like it on her face before.

Mrs. Dawnay shook hands and said good-night like one in a dream. Alice was to leave them at their door, and they all three went away together, Sir Alfred coming

down with them, and looking after the widow as if enraptured by an exquisite vision.

When they were in the drawing-room in Clarges Street, Mrs. Dawnay began, with an abruptness expressive of the words having been pent up until circumstances permitted them to be said,—

“Eugene Everard has married,—MARRIED that girl Médor, or whatever her name is.”

“Has he?” returned Susie, in a flat, flaggy voice. “And is Sir Alfred angry?”

“Angry? he is exceedingly, bitterly angry. He has known it for some time, yet he only told me to-night.” The last words were spoken with home-felt intensity.

Then she went on quietly to tell her daughter of the anonymous letter and its results.

“And so it is the end of his bright prospects,” said Susie in a low tone.

“His prospects are as bright as he de-

serves," rejoined Mrs. Dawnay in a still lower tone.

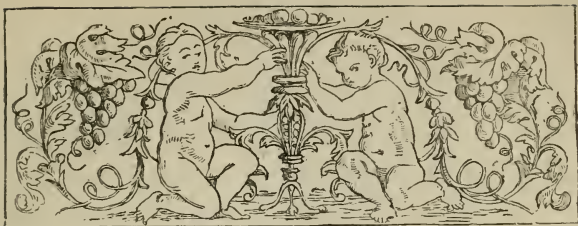
"Think of his smile," said Susan, musingly; "why, it seems to lose its meaning if he has got to work for himself like so many other men. It was the smile of sunshiny prosperity. Think of his *voice*. One hears of voices with tears in them, his had a laugh in it. Perhaps the writer of that letter *hated* his smile and his voice."

"It is not improbable. These things hide the man instead of displaying him. Oh, the world is full of counter-thrusts, counter-plots, counter-actions, counter-balances," sighed the widow, and trailed wearily upstairs to her room, which was already beginning to harbour wedding finery.

Susie followed, and would have passed her mother's half-open door with a simple "Good-night," but Mrs. Dawnay intercepted her.

“Susie,” she said, “has it shocked you? Do you feel unhappy?”

“My unhappiness is about as deep as that of a man when you spell his name S-m-i-t-h instead of S-m-y-t-h-e,” answered Susie, turning her head petulantly away, and forcing a laugh.



CHAPTER X.

THE WEDDING.

ON a beaming June day, the widow Dawnay and Sir Alfred Ogle, Bart., were made one, in the church of St. Peter, Eaton Square.

Mrs. Dawnay was an exquisite bride, in her pale dove colour and point lace.

Susie, red-eyed, white-faced, clothed in a peach-blossom tint, watched with a dull, fixed stare, the realization of a dream she had once dreamed.

The mother, so much more beautiful than herself, was married to that nearest neigh-

bour whose rank and riches Susie had once coveted, and she was present in the flesh to see her wish fulfilled.

The great, splendid house down among its trees in the Isle of Wight, would now in all probability be her future home. She shuddered ; and must she really live there ? surrounded by the luxuries she had longed for, given the empty good, great things she had so eagerly desired ?

A German writer says, "To attain is to pour oil on the sea of our wishes : to attain too late, is pouring gall instead of oil."

"Any home but that!" cried out Susie in her heart, "where I shall be reminded of him all the time. Oh, there may even be a picture of him in the room that will be given to me !"

Here the organ pealed out the Wedding March, and Susie, shedding what appeared to be a few natural tears, was clasped in her mother's arms, and given the first kiss that she gave in her changed name.

Friends crowded up. It looked very gay and charming. The golden-haired bride, tall and regal, the courtly old bridegroom with his fine air and proud carriage; the slim, girlish daughter, shedding the tears that are not unbecoming to extreme youth. The bridegroom's cheerful-faced sister beaming with smiles, and clothed in garments of price. The bright dresses of the wedding guests, the dead-sweet, heavy scent of white wedding flowers, the roll of the organ, the gorgeous streams of tinted light.

Susie was very young; insensibly she yielded to the pleasurable influences of the moment. Her mother was her mother still, although her name was different from her own.

Sir Alfred had kissed her, and called her "his own dear little daughter;" life was going to yield an abundant crop of delights, notwithstanding the drawbacks of having been flirted with and thrown aside as one

throws the stone of a peach, and of having added one more broken promise to the great bankrupt stock that the world already holds.

When she had first taken her place she had furtively glanced about her, thinking it possible that Sir Alfred might relent, and bid his nephew come to the wedding. But there was no Eugene.

"It has been a splendid wedding, hasn't it?" said Alice, managing to push her way to her cousin, as she stood with Miss Ogle at the church door, waiting to get their carriage.

"Splendid," echoed Susie, echo fashion.

"After all," said Alice, oracularly, "how much stronger circumstance is than we are."

"I dare say it is, but I don't understand what you mean," said Susie.

"No, of course you don't; see you presently at the breakfast."

The breakfast was to be given at the hotel, and was not a large one ; and in the midst of it, Susie, feeling very much like a small twig lopped from its parent stem, watched her handsome mother drive off in wedding state, alone with Sir Alfred Ogle.



CHAPTER XI.

NEW SCENES.

THE newly married pair are tasting Parisian pleasures together. They are at the Hôtel Bristol: agreeable sojourning place towards which Lady Ogle in other days has lifted hopeless eyes of longing.

They have the best rooms, looking Rue de la Paix-wards. They gratify every passing fancy. Lady Ogle's passing fancies are usually for things that would delight the heart of one aged seventeen. Sir Alfred's take the form of black pearl necklaces, point

lace fans, white enamelled smelling-bottles and diamond flies, which he thinks will look well in golden hair.

Susie is enjoying the solemn peace, the green, hushed, wind-sheltered seclusion of a cathedral close ; where the gayest sounds to be heard are the cawing of the rooks, the faint strains of the organ, the vibrating tones of the clock, tremulously distinct—tremulous, as though its brazen tongue faltered for fear at telling men and women how quickly the hours of their little span of life came round, were counted, were gone ; distinct, as though charged with a solemn mission to remind and warn, before reminding and warning should be too late.

The sleepy, golden stillness of that cathedral close at five o'clock on a July afternoon !

It seemed as if this sun and this air could not be the same that glittered and

blew on the thronged pier of Ryde, on the gay stretches of sea-side promenades, on the dusty streets of cities, on the hurrying waters of rapid rivers, on the white-capped, restless sea.

Miss Ogle's house stood just opposite the main door of the cathedral; it was made of small flint stones, and, archæologists said, was older than the cathedral itself.

There was a great drawing-room with a groined ceiling; everything cozy and comfortable was in this room, yet Susie, seated in a little low chair, tea-cup in hand, and staring about her, could not divest herself of the idea that she was taking tea in a church. For the great door was lancet shaped; the windows were huge, small paned, deeply set, in walls two feet thick; the organ chords wailed faintly in from the cathedral; and then the strange, lofty ceiling or roof, the old carving in odd unexpected places, the dumb insistence of the

whole room on having its present use forgotten and its former intention remembered.

“Perhaps,” thought Susie, “the rest of the house will be more *house-y*.”

But no. Miss Ogle, who had a pride in her self-chosen home, took Susie on a tour of inspection before showing her her own room.

The kitchen was enormous, and rich in carving. It had evidently once been a refectory ; it was useless to think of it as a kitchen.

Fantastic doors, of shapes that could only have been produced by the mediæval imagination, led here, there, and everywhere. Little windows let in light on unused little niches ; bits of elaborate carving adorned queer, inconspicuous corners.

“It does not get any more like a house,” said Susie ; and Miss Ogle laughed in glee.

“Wait till you see your room,” she said ; and straightway led her up to it.

Susie stood on the threshold in a stound. It was large enough for a battle to be fought in it, for a charity ball to be given in it, for a charge of cavalry to be made in it ; all the furniture that could possibly be collected having been placed in it, only to furnish it in spots.

Miss Ogle had had transported hither perfectly useless articles, to make it look more habitable. Up in one corner was a very old grand piano, standing on attenuated legs. As Susie saw it from the door, it appeared to be five minutes’ walk away.

There were a bagatelle board, and many other quaint objects which it would be tedious to make an inventory of.

“A fine old room, is it not ?” asked Miss Ogle.

“Yes,” said Susie, casting about for a

suitable adjective. "Noble. If I am late for dinner, please send some one up to look for me, for I dare say I may lose my way to the door, and be found wandering among the furniture."

"Would you rather have a smaller room? I have one quite the opposite of this—a little, little room, with hardly space in it for a bed, dressing-table, and chest of drawers. But this is very near mine; see, down these two little steps, and you are in my dressing-room; out of it is my bedroom."

"Oh, I like this," said Susie, quickly. "I am not nervous—at least, I used not to be until I went to my aunt, who is a spiritualist, you know. There the furniture used to be a little eccentric sometimes; and my cousin used to frighten me by telling me goblin stories in the middle of the night. But mamma does not believe in spiritualism at all; and since I

have been with her again, I have banished all silly fears from my mind."

"Spiritualism !" repeated Miss Ogle, gravely. "It was at your aunt's house, I believe, that my nephew, Eugene Everard, first met the woman who has ruined his future. You have seen her, of course ?"

"Over and over again," said Susie, affecting to arrange the feather in the hat she held in her hand.

"Was she very handsome ?"

"Very," answered Susie, shortly. "Grandly handsome. Once seen, she could never possibly be forgotten. On the stage, dressed as a man, she was dazzling, superb."

Miss Ogle groaned in spirit. "On the stage dressed as a man"—these words were as a knell to her, for she was rigid, and exact in her notions of the proprieties which should fence in the lives of the upper classes. Bitter, *bitter* to her was the matrimonial

misdeed of her handsome nephew. She turned away with a word or two to Susie, who entered her enormous chamber, and, disdaining the regiment of chairs and sofas, knelt down on the wide, cushioned window-seat, and gazed about her out of the open window.

In this county she knew was Ranicar Hungerford's place. She wondered if it was within driving distance, and if she should ever chance to see it.

She hardly knew whether she wished to see it or not.

How still it was. It seemed as if the great lungs of Nature had suspended their breath. It was nearly seven o'clock, but the air was flooded with fulvid light. The sound of an occasional wheel, or the grating caw of a rook, were the only sounds that broke the breathless silence. The purest, most spontaneous thoughts of her girlish soul floated outwards in the form of faintly-

whispered words. Not prayer, for they asked for nothing; not praise, for they lauded nothing; they were humble and self-derogating enough to justify her being so young and fortunate as she was !



CHAPTER XII.

“WHEN THE LAMP IS SHATTERED.”

DAYS passed by. Susie's sleeping hours were almost as eventful as her waking ones. There were her almost daily letters from her mother to be answered, and Alice's lively communications also.

After lunch they always drove. The roads were monotonous; drowsily lovely, green and warm.

On a certain Thursday, Miss Ogle said to Susie: “Susie, do you know that Mr. Hungerford's place is only four miles away

from us?" She had heard, of course, of Susie's short engagement.

"I knew that it was in ——shire," answered Susie, "and I have meant to ask you whether it was near."

"Where is Mr. Hungerford now?"

"Alice says that he has left England, and that it is uncertain where he is."

"Would you like to drive over and see Hungerford, dear?"

"Yes," answered Susie; "I should, very much."

Miss Ogle rang the bell.

"Thomas," she said to the servant, "is not this the day that Hungerford is shown?"

The man answered that it was.

"Shall we go to-day, Susie?"

"Yes," said Susie. "I should like to go."

The carriage was ordered early. And not long after lunch they set out, for it was a good drive.

They went at a quiet pace through the

roads—here so hot and sunny, there, where the boughs almost met overhead, so cool and shadowy.

“Through these very roads I might have driven with him beside me. Going home. To my own home, where my portrait in time would hang, and where at last I should be laid in my coffin by his side, or he would be laid by mine——”

“Do you not think so?” asked Miss Ogle for the second time, and raising her always clear voice.

“Do I not think what?” said Susie, starting.

“Do you not think this road as pretty as any in the Isle of Wight?”

“Oh! quite as pretty; prettier,” answered Susie, dreamily.

At length they stopped outside the iron gates, with their archway of stone, surmounted by a great stone bull’s head, and the horse was driven away.

“Leave your umbrellas here, if you please, madam,” said the man at the Lodge, preparing to take those harmless sun-shields.

Leave her umbrella ! She, who could have taken twenty umbrellas into the house if she had chosen. She to be shown over the rooms that might have belonged to her had she so minded. She to have beauties pointed out to her that she might have become familiarized with as with her own face in the glass. She to be told the names of the family portraits, who might have been one of them if she pleased !

Susie had never quite realized before the magnitude of what she had voluntarily given up. Magnitude as the world measures such things.

With a pettish frown she relinquished her umbrella, and followed the directions given by the man.

There were to be no bells rung. They

would be met at the door by some one who would show them over the house."

They walked in their insignificance up the trim approach, and did find some one at the door to show them about.

Susie felt a sort of angry amusement at being shown over the grand old rooms through which she might have trailed her velvet gowns, or run races with her dog. Shown over as any cockney greengrocer tourist could be shown.

She was eagerly anxious to see a portrait of the present owner; yet when she tried to frame a careless question as to such a portrait, the words died before they were uttered.

Obediently she stopped when Miss Ogle stopped, before dead Lady Bettys who had married Sir Guys, or Sir Ralphs, or plain Mr. Hungerfords, or before the Sir Guys and Sir Ralphs themselves.

Her eyes eagerly wandered away from

their powdered hair, their pearls, their flowered waistcoats, their rapiers and lace frills, in search of that well-known face, with its deep-set eyes, its firm, noble features, its dark, level eyebrows.

They went on from room to room, from picture to picture. Mysterious likenesses shone out to Susie from eyes and smiles and lips.

Ranicar, in his mulberry-coloured coat and Spanish point, who had been dead a hundred years and more, fixed his thrilling dark eyes on hers with a familiar intensity of gaze, and followed her with his glance ; for when she turned, half shuddering, to give him a farewell look, his eyes, inscrutable and dark as death, were rivetted on her still.

As they entered the scented cedar-panelled dining-room, Susie's heart gave a bound, and then set off beating at racing speed.

“The present owner, and his sister, Miss Hungerford,” droned the guide.

Two children at play together—a girl of five, a boy of fifteen.

The girl, a golden-haired little angel; the boy, a fresh-faced stripling, very hard to connect with the man whose youth was waning, and whose features were accentuated and paled by living too much in too few years.

This was the last room. Now they must go.

They clattered out upon the marble tiles of the empty, resounding hall, and the great door swung together after them. They walked slowly down, over the crunching gravel.

At the faint thud of the door beneath, a man, in a luxurious small upper room, raised himself from the chair in which he was buried, with a cigar and a book, and with

languid curiosity glanced out of the open window.

A tense, strained look came suddenly over his features ; a light leaped into his eyes like a wild, living thing ; the book dropped from his hand, and he started to his feet with a vehement, muttered exclamation.

Turning her face to take a parting glance at the house, so that her little pale profile was visible to him, was his quondam betrothed. Her long, elaborate muslin flounces drew the little stones rattling after her, the faint sound reached him here. A blue feather drooped curling over her braided hair. She was pale as a Christmas rose ; and as she turned her head away again, he saw the dejected droop of her long black lashes.

His Susie ! his beloved—his chosen one—photographing herself afresh on the mind from which he had been striving mightily

to efface all recollection of her. Her power over him was stronger than his power over himself, insignificant and of little account though she was, veteran though he was in all passes with passion, all combats against those foes to his peace of mind,—feeling, emotion, self-betrayal, keen, painful interest. Her power over him drew him near, nearer to the window, so near that his dark face and half of his figure were framed by the grey, time-worn stone.

She was to look up and see him, he told himself with the fierce positiveness that springs from strongest desire.

She did not look up and see him. She gave no backward glance whatever, but in her unconsciousness walked quickly, with the elastic tread he knew so well, down the drive (he would have been shot rather than do anything purposely to attract her attention), until at last the trees hid her from his sight.

What if she had looked back, and her astonished eyes had met his? Why did she not turn once more?

Long after her airy figure had disappeared, Hungerford stood there, the cigar in his hand slowly smouldering away, the ash dropping noiselessly to the floor.

Gone! She was gone without one glance at him, without the faintest conception that his eyes were following her as she moved away.

What was she doing down here, being shown like a stranger over the place that was to have been her home? He could not flatter himself that she knew he was there, for he only arrived that morning, quite unexpectedly, and, important personage though he was in that part of the world, he felt that he was not quite important enough to have his advent wafted abroad as the seeds of the Canada thistle are wafted.

At length he turned again into the room, threw himself back in his chair, picked up his book, and fixed his eyes on words that his absent mind made only a collection of little black marks, void of sense and meaning.

Susie, as she drove along the perfumy roads, talked with Miss Ogle about the house they had just seen, and wondered in what foreign land its absent owner was.

A soft melancholy stole over her, as she pictured him ploughing the waters of the North Sea in a yacht, or scouring some western prairie on a mustang, in picturesque recklessness, in search of a new sensation, to depose the painful one of loving and losing.

When they reached home, Miss Ogle went directly in, but Susie, restless and stiff after her long drive, walked out of the gate, and began to saunter around the close. It was about half-past six o'clock,

and the sun in the west was sending shafts of burning light from between jagged edges of black clouds.

As she walked, she pitied herself for being obliged to think such uneasy, tormenting thoughts ; but when one is seventeen, self-pity is rather a luxury than otherwise, and more and more the causes of it were merged into the thing itself.

As a green and scarlet parrot, flying along with a flock of rooks, would smite the observer's vision, so in this close did an unclerically clothed male being assume comparatively the fantastic gaudiness of a parrot among crows, and conspicuous as that gay bird would have been, was he, who, in gay summer raiment and billy-cock hat, walked the pavement trodden morn, noon, and evening, by scores of men in the sombre black and ghostly hat of the cleric.

Susie, afar off, caught sight of a rare

object in grey clothes, and yet a man, and yet not a tradesman. She looked at him with careless curiosity as he approached, because he happened to be an unusual grey man, instead of a perfectly usual black one.

He had a tall, flexible form, the layman in grey ; yes, and he had Eugene Everard's face, and Eugene Everard's voice, which said to her roughly, as its owner recoiled a little,

“ *You* here ?”

That was not like Eugene, who was never abrupt nor uncivil. They stood confronting one another, and before she could answer, and give him the perfectly unnecessary reply, Yes, she was here, he spoke again.

“ I beg your pardon ; I show neither sense nor manners, do I ?”

“ I am staying with your aunt, Miss Ogle.”

“Quite one of the family, are you not?” he returned, with a laugh so harsh and bitter that she looked up at him, startled.

“Between an unknown friend—woman, of course—and your charming mother, I am floored. You know what that means?”

“No; I do not in your case,” she said, in a low, troubled voice; “tell me.”

“In my case, then, as far as my uncle goes (and in money he goes a great way), I am done for. He has cut my acquaintance. This time last year I was a fellow with a yacht, a lot of money, given as a father gives to the son who will come after him, to do what he pleases with; I had hunters in Warwickshire, hacks in town, and a quiet old home to come to when I liked. This year I have nothing—and a wife!”

“Nothing and a wife!” repeated Susie, with a childish irony, not very fine. “That is a great compliment to *nothing*, to include a wife in it!”

She was not in the least surprised at his absence of self-restraint in speaking to her ; it seemed quite natural, and so did the unexpected meeting with him, the hearing his voice again.

“I was amazed to see you here,” he said, with a change of tone. “You don’t seem in the least surprised to see me.”

“I am not surprised,” answered Susie, quietly, “and yet I never expected to see you again. You are coming to see Miss Ogle, I suppose?”

“Yes,” he replied, gloomily. “I am coming to say good-bye to the only person in the world who I could reasonably suppose would care to have a parting word from me. I don’t know that *she* will care about it particularly.”

“Where are you going?” said Susie, in the voice that a young Quakeress says “How does thee do, friend?”

“I am going to America, the only country

where work means something besides ill-paid labour. I'm going there. My uncle threw me a pittance and said, 'Go and work. You've joined yourself to the working classes—or worse. Go and work yourself, and keep from doing worse if you can.' Sir Alfred has a temper that makes quite an orator of him, I assure you, when the fit is on. Quite an impassioned orator, with a distinct recollection of the profanities of his youth."

"Are you happy?" said Susie.

"Happy!" he repeated, looking at her with a puzzled frown; "I daresay I might be, if I did not feel so like a fish out of water."

All this time they had been walking at a snail's pace towards the house.

"For what we know," said Susie, with a small, faint laugh, "the fish out of water may be in a kind of ecstasy, flapping his tail and his fins for rapturous joy."

“Pshaw!” said Eugene, in the impatient rough way that was so new to her in him, the tone of a man in whom all wish to please or impress favourably was dead.

Susie felt that her nonsense might savour of indifference, her sense she could not trust; she feared that it would convict her of feeling.

“But why should I not feel for him?” she thought, and stopping short looked up at him with grave eyes of a melting softness, with the heart shining out of them, and the rich light shining into them.

“If it happens that at any time I have it in my power to be of any use to you, you will let me be, won’t you?”

“The worst of it is,” he answered, “that now-a-days the meanings of such terms as ‘of use,’ ‘of service,’ ‘if I can do you any good,’ ‘if I can help you,’ all turn themselves into the confounded word—money. Apart from money, I shall be delighted to

accept your kind offer of being of use to me."

He had misunderstood her, he was angry, thought she, and hung her head in mortification.

It was true. His face showed the bitterest annoyance. She had misspoken.

"Don't," he continued with the hard laugh he had given before, "don't try to soften my uncle's heart towards me. He is not fond enough of you for you to succeed. You would make matters worse. I am afraid, my dear Miss Dawney, that attempts to befriend me would be so much lost time."

"You are very much changed," said Susie, lifting up her shame-drooped head, and turning to him with burning cheeks; "I would not have believed that you could say 'My dear Miss Dawney' in that extraordinary tone."

He smiled in something of his old way.

“Of course I am changed,” he said, the melancholy of his once laughing eyes hardly matching the bright smile. “A fellow could not be more changed than I am. *Did* I say ‘My dear Miss Dawnay’ in an extraordinary way? I had much rather have said ‘My dear Susie,’ and there is no reason in life why I should not; as I said before, you are quite one of the family. We can be Eugene and Susie now to one another as long as we last.”

There was in his tone the sadness of one who mocks at self and self’s sense-bound deeds, when *too late* sense is free again, and the self of body and soul is bound.

“Don’t go in quite yet,” he went on with insidious melancholy, as they drew near Miss Ogle’s gate, “walk round the Close, this way, towards the Canonry. I always thought this corner the prettiest part of all. How long have you been here?”

“A long time,” replied Susie. “I should

have to look in the Prayer Book to tell you exactly how long."

"Why the Prayer Book? Was it made a Saint's day when you came down here?"

"No, but I put the mark in the psalms the first morning after I arrived, and it has been there ever since."

"Because you have not read them since?" he asked.

"Yes," assented Susie. "I go to church so much it does not seem worth while for me to read them."

"And where are your—mother and Sir Alfred?"

"They are in Paris."

"Oh, a wedding tour, I see. And you came to Aunt Gladys. A very discreet and suitable arrangement. And are you enjoying yourself down here?"

"Very much. We went to a garden party last week, to-morrow I am going on a paper-chase over the downs with the Monck boys and their cousins."

“Oh, I say, a paper-chase! I wish I was going myself. I remember the Monck boys. I should like to see you on a paper-chase. You’ll have on a French gown with a train, a bonnet trimmed with feathers, and shoes with Louis Quinze heels, I suppose.”

“Oh, no!” contradicted Susie, eagerly. “I am going to wear a short serge dress with a leather belt, and a sailor hat. I expect to catch him.”

“What good spirits you are in,” he said, relaxing from his momentary blitheness into his former fretful, gloomy manner. “You were born to play, I suppose. I thought I was; but it seems I was mistaken. I am born to work, after all.”

“You!” exclaimed Susie, palpably glancing at his small, delicate hands and light, slender figure; “you never can work.”

“Then, if I cannot work, starvation must be my romantic lot.”

“No, no; that is very well in a book,”

said Susie, sagely ; “ people like you don’t starve in real life.”

“ If they have nothing but work between themselves and it, they chose the one alternative, just as I am going to do. I think I shall go to the gold-diggings when I get out there. Gold ! the word has an alluring sound, even if it has diggings after it. The worst of it is, it’s very often all diggings and no gold.”

“ Oh, your uncle should not be so hard-hearted !” said Susie, movingly, as if she were speaking of crying woes of her own. “ Surely if he knows that you intend going he will prevent you ; he will never let you rush headlong into a life of hardship and privation.”

He softened under the influence of her sympathy ; and it came home to him with a qualm of conscience how little he deserved sympathy at her hands. He was not given to criticizing actions, but instinctively he

felt that certain of his actions in regard to her would not bear criticism.

"You are very kind," he said, abruptly. "I have talked to you as I would to a sister, or a very old and tried friend. You are one of the few people from whom I could bear sympathy. I might almost say that you are the only one. How smart you are!" gazing down at her crisp dress and leghorn hat and feather. "Where have you been? to call on some of the magnates?"

"No," said Susie, flushing a little under his earnest look; the look that a man has who is receiving into his mind the image of a dear face to be seen no more. "We have only been driving. We went over to see Hungerford House."

"Hungerford House?"

"Yes."

"And had you not misgivings as to what you had done apropos to Hungerford? Did you not wish that you had him back again, with all his advantages on his head?"

“No, not for one instant,” answered Susie, calmly. “We were not in the least suited to each other.”

“Suited to each other!——” he echoed, with a sigh, and checked himself. Whatever else he had been going to say remained unsaid.

“I must go in,” cried Susie, hastily. “Come, walk faster.”

“Do you remember that this is the last English twilight I shall ever see?”

“Ever?”

“Yes, ever. I shall never come back to England. Why should I? Your mother is everything to Sir Alfred now. He doesn’t care to set his eyes on me again. Yes; this is the last English twilight that I shall ever see.”

“Oh, how sad!” said Susie. “Then, look about you, and try and drink in some of the peace we are surrounded by. See, the tall spire points straight up into heaven. This

green grass we are walking on is made velvety and bright because of the quiet sleepers underneath. In each of these houses live good men and women, whose lives go on as quietly as the river at the end of their gardens. Even the rooks give one an idea of safety and repose, because they are coming *home*. Hark! except for their cawing, there is not a sound to tell us that there is a world outside this green, shady nook. I am glad that I have not got to go out and fight with life. I am sorry, so sorry, that *you* have."

"My dear child," he replied, smiling, "to me a cathedral close is the acme of dreariness. I had rather fight the nine lives of a cat out than stagnate in the midst of dull moralities. But it is as lovely an evening and as peaceful a scene as I shall probably ever see again, so I intend to carry away a very vivid picture of it."

He looked straight at her as he spoke, and she moved quickly on.

“As for peace,” he added, bending over her, and speaking in a low tone, “not all the spires pointing heavenward, nor all the rooks going home, nor walking on all the graves that ever were dug, nor looking at the houses of all the monotonously, untemptedly good people who ever were born, can give me any peace. Do *you* feel particularly peaceful, Susie? I never felt less so in my life.”

She did not answer, hurrying on faster than before.

At the door she turned and looked at him. There was a naïve and childlike expression on her face, such as only women with light eyes, dark curling lashes, high eyebrows, and slightly defined features can have. Other women may hold in their hearts the very same thoughts and feelings which bring the look to the surface; but it

is vanquished and undone by fine features of classic mould, and eyes too dark for the pupil to be distinctly visible. It is changed into severity by a level eyebrow, and a Greek or aquiline nose ages it.

“Where is your wife?” she asked.

“She is in London,” he replied briefly. “And in all her life,” he went on rapidly, a red streak flaming into his cheek, “beautiful—ten times more beautiful than you, or any other woman—as she is, she can never have looked as you do now. Probably,” he continued, more quickly still, “because she has never felt as you do now. Susie! cannot you, will not you, put into words what I see in your face?”

But, as he spoke, the look died away; he had killed it.

“Come in!” she cried, imperiously; “and don’t ask for the translation of my looks into words, unless you wish your vanity wounded.”

“There was nothing in your face to wound my vanity,” he answered, not very temperately. “Your eyes seemed to be asking me something.”

“Miss Gladys !” said Susie, opening the drawing-room door ; and Eugene, being obliged to enter, the aunt and nephew were face to face.

“How do you do, Eugene ?” said Miss Ogle, holding out her hand coldly, and making it very plain that her nephew was not to kiss her, “this is a surprise——”

“Don’t flourish my unwelcomeness in my face, please,” said he, cutting her short. “I have only come to say good-bye to you. I am about to leave England with no intention of ever returning to it ; and I think that every man born into this world should have, in a country holding twenty million souls, *one* person to say farewell to, when he is leaving that country for good—or for bad—and all. *You* are the one person

whom I claim as my right to bid good-bye to."

"Oh, Eugene!" said Miss Ogle, softening perceptibly; "are you in earnest? Do you really mean to leave England? Where are you going?"

"To America; to the labour for which my early training and education have so eminently fitted me. Sir Alfred, after giving me every incentive to play, has now kindly given me every incentive to work. Last year at this time I had an allowance of three thousand pounds; this year I have an income of just ninety. That ninety representing the crumbs remaining after the life-long revel that my light-hearted father enjoyed with my mother's fortune. He bequeathed me his face, however; perhaps he thought that made up for other deficiencies."

"Eugene, you should not speak so of your father!"

“ You forget that I never had the pleasure of his acquaintance ; I almost wish I had never had the pleasure of his only son’s.” Throwing himself down in a chair with an unmirthful laugh. “ The train will take me back to town at nine o’clock this evening. Don’t ask me to stay and dine unless you like ; I know the hotel very well. They have a pretty good cook.”

“ Oh ! yes, Eugene, stay and dine,” said Miss Ogle, seating herself nearer to him. And, Susie discreetly leaving the room, she set herself to blame him in hard words but tender tones for “ wrecking himself,” as she said, and with fluent tongue bewailed the blighting of his prospects, the darkness of his future.

He silenced her with a sternness that seemed to change the bearing of their mutual relationship.

His mother’s sister was only a woman, after all. And her life had the narrowest

boundaries of her sex. He, a generation younger, and with years half as many, had more of life in one of his months than she in twenty of her years. It was like the canary-bird born in a cage telling the results of travel to the wild seamew, or to the restless swallow, this telling a man the moral quality of deeds that he had *done*, and whose consequences he was reaping. It was like drawing in faintest, feeblest lines, a fancy sketch of what he had a photograph of from the life.

Miss Ogle was judicious enough to refrain from further speech on a subject that was an irretrievable reality. When she again opened her lips it was to say with the kindest womanly tact :—

“I have some odds and ends of money floating about, Eugene, that you are welcome to, if you need it.”

He took her hand in his. “Not now,” he said ; “I am going to see what I can do

for myself. I may succeed, who knows? But if I fail, and am in a great strait, I shall ask you to help me, Aunt Gladys. I hope I may hit on something. I have enough money in hand to make a good start, and my wife's uncle being an American, of course he knows the United States like a book, and will put a fellow in the right track. My wife is the handsomest woman the sun ever shone on. I wish you could see her."

Miss Ogle withdrew her hand from his.

"I cannot echo your wish," she said, coldly.

Then Susie came back into the room, and Eugene was permitted to go up and wash his hands before the dinner which he had been invited to share.

It was not an unpleasant meal. It was not dreary and stiff, as it might have been. Now and then gaiety came into looks, and words, and tones.

Susie, who was supposed to be an outsider, and not a partaker in the grievances of the Ogle family, acted out her part with great spirit.

They did not dine till half-past seven. Miss Ogle's dinners were sufficiently good and ceremonious to be works of time. Miss Ogle herself was not indifferent to the pleasures of the table, neither was her nephew.

When they went back to the drawing-room, Eugene glanced carelessly up at the clock on the mantel-piece, looked at his watch, finally went over and consulted a time-piece standing on a table in a corner.

"I have lost my train," he said ; and as he spoke he went over and planted himself exactly in front of his aunt, in a particularly boyish and well-remembered way, looking into her face with his genial smile.

"The little room over the pantry is empty ; you may stay here all night, of

course," she said, loving him as the most engaging, most worthless of nephews, as she looked up into his handsome face.

"Thanks, Aunt Gladys ; you are a trump. You are the very ace of trumps. And now, as you dislike tobacco, I will go and stroll about the close while I smoke a cigar."

He sauntered out of the room and out of the house.

The moon had risen, and silvered the grand front of the great Christian temple, and made of the tall spire a shaft of pointed brightness against the cavernous darkness of the sky. The stars, those throbbing pulses of the night, seemed almost too near and luminous for England ; more fitted for a land of perpetual summer, like the one where that beautiful wife of his had been born.

The smoke that issued from his lips carried a sigh with it.

Just at this moment the dainty foot-fall of a well-bred horse broke the stillness. A mounted some one was approaching him from behind, at a walk. As the horse came up with him, he turned and looked at the rider. The rider turned to look at him.

“Hungerford!” exclaimed Eugene; “so you are in this part of the world, are you? I had an idea that you were discovering the source of the Nile, or making notes on the North Pole from personal observation.”

“I only got back to-day. I am belated.”

There was a ringing, metallic sound in his voice. His face Eugene could not distinctly see. Perhaps it was as well that he could not.

Ranicar’s high-strung horse plunged and reared, so had its master tightened his hold on the reins.

Ranicar, in the same unmodulated tone, said,—

“And you are doing ——? Some people have a sort of pride, I know, in saying that they have seen every cathedral town in England.”

“Nothing of the sort,” answered Eugene, with a slight laugh. “I have no ambition that way. I came down to see an aunt of mine, who lives over there,” pointing out the house.

Intense as Hungerford’s curiosity was to know where Susie was—whether with that very aunt or not—it was yet controllable. In the newspaper he had seen the marriage of Sir Alfred and Mrs. Dawnay ; but of Eugene’s marriage he was ignorant.

“Oh, ah !” he replied, with an undiscoverable imitation of complete indifference. “My horse is fretful. Good night to you.”

“Good night,” returned Eugene ; and looked after him as he rode away with anything but good will. He finished his cigar and went in.

Ranicar, his face showing sharp and ghastly in the moonlight, rode on for a short distance. Then he pulled his horse sharply round.

“I’ll know where she is before I sleep,” he muttered, and retraced his steps up the narrow, echoing street, through an old grey archway, and so in at the side of the close again.

But Eugene had disappeared.

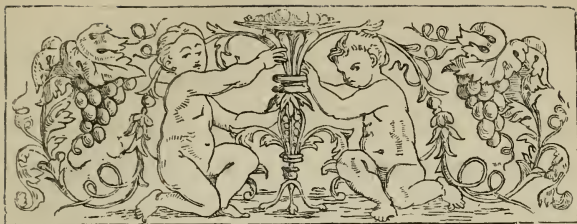
He rode slowly as his horse would go past the house that Everard had indicated. From out the great window, which was open wide, issued a stream of light and the notes of a woman’s voice. The night was so still that he heard distinctly, not only the air, but the words of the song—

“Oh Love, who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
Why choose you the frailest
For your cradle, your home, and your bier?”

It was Susie singing—singing the song she had once refused to sing to him, to his rival !

Yes, there they were together, under the same roof. The only woman he had ever truly loved ; the only man he had ever truly hated.

He struck his teeth together savagely, and digging his spurs into his horse's sides, galloped madly away.



CHAPTER XIII.

EUGENE'S NOTE.

YES, on the other side of that lighted window Susie was singing, and Eugene bent over her as she sung.

If her frank and noble spirit had ever harboured a wish for revenge, it had it now.

Eugene, looking at her, felt that his whole life was shadowed by a grand mistake.

Small mistakes are the little foxes that spoil the vines.

What can be said of those great ill-judged deeds which cannot be lived down, which circumstances are powerless to modify? They raven like wolves on the peaceable flock of our joys, successes, triumphs, hopes.

The dainty grace of Susie's form, the ineffable charm of her face, the ringing notes of her youthful voice, made the old room a scene of enchantment to him. Perhaps a few nights from now, Hungerford, reinstated in favour, would be standing in his place, finding it charmed ground just as he found it. With all the strength of his soul he hoped that Susie would never marry Hungerford; never marry any one, but above all, Hungerford. It seemed to him that if he could get her to promise him that she would not marry her old lover, he could bear whatever assaults misfortune and unsuccess made on him in the time to come without grumbling.

Susie finished her song, and came away from the piano.

“Oh, by-the-way,” said Eugene, “do you know whom I met out here in the close,—taking a nocturnal ride?—Hungerford.”

“Hungerford!” exclaimed Susie, the blood rushing hotly to her face. “Why, I thought he was—anywhere but in England.”

“Well, it seems that he is anywhere but *not* in England. We gave each other a Spartan greeting. I believe I mean Spartan. They were the fellows who gave themselves a short allowance of words, food, and feeling, weren’t they?”

“Oh, never mind about them,” cried Susie, eagerly; “do tell me about Mr. Hungerford. He was riding, you said?”

“Yes, riding,” repeated Everard, sullenly. When would he ride again? he wondered. “He pretended to think that I had come down to see the cathedral. I

told him I didn't go in for cathedrals. Then off he went."

"Was that all you said, either of you?" asked Susie, incredulously.

"If you doubt it," he returned, his sulky manner aggravated, "you'll probably have plenty of opportunities of asking him if there was anything else. There was nothing about *you* said, that I can assure you."

"I did not for an instant suppose that there was," said Susie, vexedly, and wondering at the capabilities for disagreeableness the agreeable Eugene had.

She seated herself beside Miss Ogle, and all three carried on a desultory conversation. They were none of them so cheerful as they had been at dinner.

Eugene longed to be able to speak alone to Susie for a few minutes, but all his manoeuvres to make her come and look at the moonlight, to sing another song, to go

over to a distant table and show photographs to him, were unsuccessful.

“Good night,” he said, holding out his hand to her at the foot of the stairs. Queer old stairs, winding up from an unreasonable corner of the back hall.

“Good night,” replied Susie, placing her hand in his, and experiencing a jog of acutest astonishment at finding a slip of paper between her fingers when she withdrew them.

Miss Ogle was on the stair above her, her back turned as she mounted. Susie went on after her. Eugene returned to drink a glass of brandy and soda.

Susie, on reaching her room, closed her quaintly-carved door, and holding the paper up to the candle, read, in the very black and distinct characters that patent pencils make on the enamelled leaves of note-books, “*I wish I could make you swear never to marry H—d.*” There was a *mélée*

of feelings in her brain. Indignation, misgiving, wonder, a new sense of humiliation, a new sense of freedom; a knowledge of her own late want of perception in regard to Eugene's falling short of a high moral standard.

The candle that she had been holding in her left hand dipped down at the angle an ebriate holds a candle, and the wax dripped greasy tears on her. She hustled it amongst a quantity of laces and inflammable stuff on the table, not looking where she placed it, and with the trembling haste of mingled anger and shame, tore the paper in half, and thrust it in a basket full of torn up letters from her mother and Alice.

Her heart beat so violently that unaccustomed pulses in her temples throbbed.

She wished that Eugene had never come, and yoked to this wish was the thought that after to-morrow he would be gone from her life for ever. She should never see his face again.

For the first time since she had been in — she heard the sonorous clang of the clock as it struck midnight, and the three strokes after midnight. There was no sleep for her, indeed, until the ashy dawn-light made a wan picture of the sleeping close.

She stole to the window and looked out. She knew that she would not have been so wakeful if she had not drunk a cup of strong tea after dinner.

“I’ll never take it again!” she announced to the dead-still world, as she leaned her head out of the window, and inhaled a deep breath of air.

Then, turning back to the room, she took up a little book, and read a verse or two of a tranquillizing hymn, and, creeping into bed, lay presently, a little motionless piece of vivified dust, in a corner of her vast old room.



CHAPTER XIV.

“ LOVE, STRONG AS DEATH, IS DEAD.”

“ **F**AREWELL,” said Eugene, holding out his hand.

They—he, and Susie—were standing together in the dining room after breakfast. Miss Ogle had gone away to put on her bonnet. She was going to drive her nephew to the station in her little pony carriage.

“ Strange !” he said in a stifled voice, “ that a word which has caused so many heart-aches, so many tears, should express its meaning so badly. Farewell. That

is, be prosperous, be happy, be healthy. Where can you find a word that actually conveys an idea of separation? Of cruel parting? There is not one; but if there were, I could not bear to say it to *you*, Susie. Did you read what I gave you last night? You would not give me an opportunity to *say* it to you."

She bent her head assentingly.

"And will you? Do! for your own sake; he would make you wretched. Will you?"

"No. I will not. How can you be so unreasonable as to want me to swear that I will answer, in a certain way, a question that will never be asked me? Say no more about it. And after this morning we shall never meet again; so what difference can it make to you what I do with myself? Good-bye. I hope with all my heart that you will be fortunate. Will you be angry with me if I say that I do not believe you will ever be really happy?"

“Angry? No,” he returned, trying to raise her hand to his lips, “it is true; I ——”

“Hush,” she interrupted, “someway I had rather not hear you say it yourself. See,” she went on rapidly, and taking something out of the book of hymns she had read the night before, “it is an inscription I found the other day on an old sundial.”

It was a little couplet that she had illuminated on a slip of paper:—

“Be true as dial to the sun, although not always shined upon.”

“I will give it you if you like. But you must apply it to yourself.”

“Be true?” he answered, taking it, and looking full at her. “To whom?”

“To Heaven,” she said rebukingly, and meeting his glance with calm self-trust.

“I will be true,” he returned, putting the text in his pocket, “after a fashion of

my own. Just now I can think of no such words as truth and Heaven. My mind can only take in the bitter thought that I am parting with you." He paused.

She was unattainable now. How infallibly charming, how perfectly desirable it made her!

"I curse the day," he went on, his words rushing out uncurbed, unlicensed, incoherent, "that saw me a victim to my own folly, my blind determination, my hood-winked madness. Blind love often leads to clearsighted distaste. I would wrench myself free if I could. A look, a word from you, would make me leave her, would make me let her go to America alone,—make me slip away from Liverpool, and come back without her. I am in that state of mind when I could be drawn by a hair. What chances of happiness I had! But now I am bound!" (striking his teeth together) "and I long to be free. I am

chained,—I, who kept my liberty so long. Other men, not half so wary as I have been, are walking about with no accursed clog tied to them, as I have. How was it that *I* got into the slough, and they managed to keep out of it? What could I have been thinking about? If it had not been for Hungerford ——. She would have wavered away from me in a minute, if she could have disposed of herself more advantageously ——”

“Stop!” said Susie, in a faint, husky voice. “This is *you*, is it? This black-hearted, faint-hearted ——” Whatever last word she had been going to say, died away half uttered. She looked like a child who has been terrified by a monstrous ghost-story. Not one tinge of colour relieved the dead whiteness of her face.

“I have frightened you, shocked you?” said Eugene, biting and tearing his underlip till the delicate skin hung ragged.

"I feel cut to the bone," said Susie, only conscious that she was staring fixedly at the carving-knife on the side board, and that some cruel wound had been given her. "Let me go!" she went on, hardly above a whisper. "I want to go and kneel down, and hide my head in the pillow, that I may shut out everything. I never want to hear your voice, or see your face again."

She sprang towards the door.

As she went away he intercepted her, and leaned back against the door to bar her in. "For once," he said, "I have spoken out honestly, and with all your talk about truthfulness and frankness, it seems you do not like it."

"Not traitor's truth, knave's honesty!" she would have said if she could, but she only stood there speechless, and with white parted lips, frowning at him to let her go.

"Speak!" he said.

"Move!" she answered.

He stepped aside, and opened the door for her.

“And you’ll marry Hungerford and be as happy as all the pomps and vanities can make you (they can make women perfectly happy);” he said, with a total change of tone.

The last words followed her as she rushed upstairs to her room. Shutting the door, she knelt down by her bed and hid her face in the pillow, while hot angry tears welled into her closed eyelids.

Her mental sensations were comparable with the physical ones of a man who has been rolled down hill in a cask lined with spikes. The humiliation of being forced to recognize his opinion of her in the words he had dared say to her, the usage he had given her from the first moment of her acquaintance with him, was only equalled by her self-contempt at not having long ago disabused herself of a faultily flattering opinion of him.

In a minute or two she heard the rolling of the wheels that bore him away. The sound heartened her. She got up, brushed the tears from her eyes, and taking the first means of self-escape possible, resolved to go on the paper-chase, with the hope of banishing this most detestable experience of her life from her mind.

Happening to look out of the window she saw a troop of boys and girls coming towards the gate. She breathed a deep breath, and then bustled about the room, preparing to go out. But although she was not aware of it, everything was done mechanically, with fixed eyes and uncertain, pre-occupied movements. Still, she was ready in a few moments, and went down stairs trying with all her might to dismiss the hateful thoughts that would recur with a baffling persistency to her.

When Miss Ogle returned from taking her nephew to his train, she found every

waste paper basket in the house empty, and Susie gone with the Monck boys and girls and others to the Downs.

It was a very exciting thing that paper chase. The rabbits were scuttling into their holes, the sky was grey and over-cast, there was not the slightest breath of wind to stir the furze and broom, nor the paper-trail; and, running as fast as their feet would carry them, the girls followed at an ignominious distance behind the fleetest boys.

A gentleman returning home to luncheon with a fishing rod in his hand, stooped down and picked up some stray pieces of paper that fluttered across his path; he did it in a mechanical, absent sort of way.

There were a few words written on one of these bits, and before he realized that he had looked at them, they had struck down into the deepest depth of his consciousness, robbed him of all self-control, and given

meat and drink to the strong passions that he tried so hard to starve out.

Taking out his book of flies, Ranicar Hungerford placed in it the slip of paper, and continued his homeward way.

Presently there came running past him a boy who was doubling like a hare, and scattering bits of paper as he went; after him laboured other boys, and after them again, at a long distance, came several girls, their ages ranging from ten to fourteen. He watched them with a slight, bitter smile until they were out of sight, and then walked on. He had not seen the last of them it seemed, for coming along panting, dishevelled, alone, her sailor hat hanging at the back of her head, her hair dropping down, with hair-pins half in half out, her dress caught up until it displayed her ankles, ran Susie.

Hungerford sprang towards her, all the violence of his nature showing in that one

gesture, fit exponent only of the instinct of the beast of prey, or the sanguinary Sioux, with nothing of civilization or culture in its nervous grace and animal energy.

"I cannot stop," panted Susie, eluding him, "I am on a paper chase."

"I know you are," he replied with another spring that brought him in front of her. "You cannot run much longer, you are giving out. *You shall not go on.* I want to speak to you."

She did not answer him, but dodging past him, ran on; he pursued her, so making her already palpitating heart surge up into her ears.

There is a sort of agony in feeling one's self pursued by feet that will inevitably overtake one.

Spent and exhausted she stopped at last, and turning suddenly found him close behind her.

"I can run no more," she gasped. "I

can chase, I can't bear being chased. I don't know where I am, I am lost. Where am I? Please show me how to get back to the Close again. They are all out of sight—those children. Nasty children."

"I will set you on your homeward way, but I want to speak to you first. I too have been enjoying the pleasures of the chase." And as he spoke he took out of his fly-book the scrap of paper he had found, and handed it to her.

"*Swear never to marry H——d,*" swam before her eyes.

She clasped her hands together, looking up at him with tragic appeal.

"I did not tear it small enough!" she said in a heart-rent voice.

"Honest and naïve always," he returned, his face softening as he looked at her. "No attempt at denial or evasion. I believe that your dying confession would be naïve.

Explain this. I know who wrote it, of course. But why was it written?"

"I don't know," she murmured, walking on.

"You are going in exactly the opposite direction to——," he said.

She turned and came back towards him.

"And did you swear?" he continued, catching her by the wrist. There was as much difference between his face now and as she had hitherto seen it, as there is between a torch lighted and a torch unlighted.

"I shall not answer you. Show me the way back, you said you would. Let go my wrist."

"Did you swear?" he reiterated, making null all words, looks, and tones of hers.

"I never swear."

"It is not surprising that he should exhort his friends not to marry; he finds it a mistake himself, perhaps. Do you know

what I was told in a letter to-day?—that he is said to have married the Chevalier d'Industrie Léontine, whatever her name is !”

“Yes, I know it.”

“Oh, you know it! Is he still here? But I need not ask. If he were, you would not be running about the Downs with a lot of children.”

“It cannot possibly concern you whether he is here or not,” said Susie, frowning furiously at him.

“Not concern me, when I find in his handwriting such a thing as this?”

“It must have been possessed with Satan to blow across your path,” cried she. “I tell you again I have no idea why he wrote it”—(flushing with bitter mortification).

“We had not mentioned you, except that he said he had met you for a moment in the Close after dinner. As I was going upstairs to bed, he slipped this into my hand

as he said good-night to me. It was a joke, I suppose. He wrote it for fun."

"You know he did not. Did he take it for granted, then, that I was going to ask you a second time to marry me?" he said, with a grim satisfaction in torturing her.

Hot tears of shame rushed to her eyes.

"Certainly he did not."

"Certainly he did, or he would not have written that. Why did he not say it to you?"

"You are wounding and humiliating me," she said, desperately. "Let go my wrist."

"No; not until you tell me fully, and explicitly, and circumstantially, how he came to write it, and in what manner you replied to him."

"I have told you once all I know about how he came to write it. I know no more than that. And the next morning after breakfast I told him that it was a strange idea to want me to promise that I would

give a certain answer to a question that would never be asked me. Those were my very words."

"What a dog in the manger the fellow is," said Hungerford, with savage contempt. "He ought to be taught better. I am going to show this to him. I will, if I have to chase him over half the world. I have wanted an occupation—an interest; I will make this one."

"You terrify me," said Susie, sinking down on the balmy ground for sheer dismay. "If you would only use stronger words and say them differently. There is something in your tone that seems to belong to your eyes, and your eyes as they looked an instant ago I shall never forget! I thought you were cool and self-contained—a finished gentleman. I did not know you had a *panther's* nature."

"I think you are going to faint," he said, looking into her ashy face. "I have a flask

of cognac in my pocket, but I shall not give you any, it might prevent you ; and I rather want you to faint than otherwise, for then I should carry you home—to Hungerford, I mean.”

“You could not revive me better than by saying that,” she returned, struggling to her feet, and beginning to walk on.

He kept by her side.

“You have a long distance before you,” he said, in the same tone of fierce amusement that he had used before. “Your playfellows left you in the lurch, did they not ? Do you know that you must have run several miles, for you are close upon Hungerford. You had better come in and lunch with me, and I will send you home afterwards.”

“No,” said Susie ; “not for the world ! Oh, if I were only safely back with Miss Gladys. You are sure you are showing me the shortest way ?”

He laughed disagreeably.

“You must really come with me and wait until a horse can be harnessed to take you back to ———. It is a physical impossibility for you to walk from here, there. You are limping now. Would you like to take my arm?”

“No,” said Susie, sturdily, and shaking her head.

Her feet ached excruciatingly; so did her side. There was a queer, unpleasant tremulousness in her knees. All her hair seemed weighing on one hair-pin, and the hair-pin felt as if it was screwed into her skull.

Uneasy in mind, sick at heart, she limped along, a worn out miserable atom.

The soft grey sky began weeping soft small tears of misty rain.

“What shall I do!” she ejaculated, looking up at the set profile of her now silent companion.

“I have but the one suggestion to make

which I have already made," he replied, coldly. "As that meets with your total disapproval, the only alternative is, that you must walk from Hungerford back to ——. It is three miles ; that is all."

"Three miles !" repeated Susie, very much as she would have said three thousand. "How can I ever walk three miles, and alone ! But it is troubling you too much to send me back."

"I shall not harness the horse," he replied, curtly. "There is no very active inconvenience to me in giving you the shelter of my roof for twenty minutes."

"I'll tell you," she said, hesitatingly. "Suppose you go on quickly—you see how slowly I have to walk—and order whatever it is to meet me somewhere."

"Impossible," he answered. "In the first place, I'm not going to leave you here hobbling along by yourself ; in the second, wheels cannot clear stiles and hedges. We go

straight across these fields into my grounds; there is no road for a vehicle to come and meet you. You must cross that stile—you see it? A field, another stile, and then you are in my place. To get to ———, you must go out of my entrance-gate, and so along the Queen's highway into the town."

"Very well," she said, with compulsory acquiescence, "I suppose I must be indebted to you for this kindness—"

Footsore and weary, she stumbled as she spoke. He made an involuntary, eager movement to help her, but she recoiled from his outstretched hand.

Her hair now was hanging in two long plaits down her back, and a long love-lock escaped and curled about one ear. Her air of dejection softened the pert piquancy of her irregular face into a tender, pallid prettiness that was almost beauty.

"Pray take my arm," he said, in the old tone of protecting fondness, that she

knew so well. "You foolish child, to go racing over the Downs in those little, high-heeled, thin French shoes. Foolish to go at all. Why did you? You must be very much at a loss for amusement."

"I had promised them; besides, I wanted to run over these wavy Downs. Oh, must we cross still another field? You *might* have gone on, as I asked you, and told them to harness the horse."

"Yes, I might," he said, freezing again.

They crossed the field in absolute silence, and entering his grounds, made their way up to the house.

Susie had eaten very little breakfast, and now, at half-past three, felt dizzy, faint, exhausted to bewilderment.

They went into the house, and entered a room not shown to the public. There he left her for a moment, and while he was gone she looked about her.

It was a little brilliant room, panelled in

oak, with a *plaque* of Capo di Monti in each panel ; sylvan scenes in miniature standing out delicately bright from the pale yellow of the wood. There were a pair of old tulip-wood cabinets, with porcelain panels ; shelves on each side of the fireplace held *cinquecento* bronzes, tear-bottles, a queer bit of Cypriote pottery, a jewelled-hilted dagger or two, a lapis-lazuli box, brimming with intaglios, a little old puzzle-jug, a miniature by Zuccherò.

Over the mantel-piece hung a portrait of a young girl with a face sweet, pale, morbidly sentimental. She was painted as if seated at an open window, a little red Greek cap on her head, a Greek jacket covered with gold embroidery, a lute on her knees. Beside her a mimosa, the leaves shutting at the contact of her sleeve.

As Susie was looking at this pictured girl, Ranicarre-entered the room, bringing himself a glass of wine, which he made her drink.

"You are very kind," she said, looking up at him with a faint smile.

"There was a time," he said, in the disjointed way of a man talking to himself, "when you did not dislike me at all. I have a strong determination to marry you. I have not often been baffled in my life."

"I can baffle you," replied Susie, briefly. "If your determination is strong as Samson, mine is stronger still."

"You do not wish to marry me?"

"No; I do not wish to spoil your life and my own. I distinctly refuse, and I cannot express any gratitude for the honour done me, because you speak in such an inquisitor's tone."

"But I refuse to let you refuse."

"You are not to speak to me in that way," she cried, with anger-darkened eyes; "and there is absurdity in such a speech as that, which I should not have expected from you. Why you did not care a bit

when the engagement between us came to an end. You parted from me with all the good will possible. I know why it is that you are so desperately determined. I can scarcely believe that this is you! It frightens, shocks, sickens me!" she went on, with increasing anger, "to see what men can and will do and say."

She paused.

"Now," he said, "end this fit of infant anger appropriately. Stamp your foot and say, 'I *hate* you!'"

"No," she replied, more temperately, "I don't hate you; I rather like you; at least I *did* like you; I do not think I like you much now, since I have found how different you can be from what I have ever seen you. But I do not hate you; I could not hate anybody unless they murdered mother."

"I object to your liking me," he said, striking down the lid of an open inkstand violently, as if he must have an outlet,

however slight, for the intensity of what he was feeling.

“You are going to say now that you refuse to let me like you,” she cut in with a faint laugh.

“I should rather have you hate me outright, than coolly like me. A cool liking is insurmountable, hatred is not,” he said, bending slightly towards her.

“I can try and dislike you very much, if that will do as well,” said Susie, with teasing simplicity.

Ranicar started upright, and “Love’s bold seignory” being less arbitrary, less forceful than that other seignory which ruled his life, was able to answer in tones that again sounded familiar to himself—tones of unconcern and civil relinquishment.

“I beg that you will let me slip into any position that you see fit. We have wasted a good deal of emotion on your friend’s poor joke——”

“He is not my friend,” broke in Susie, breathlessly.

“No?” said Hungerford, with a slight smile. “That shows that it is never safe to commit one’s self even by using a possessive pronoun. I will say, then, *my* friend, if you prefer it.”

“But he is not your friend any more than he is mine,” said Susie, frowning.

“Still I have made myself intelligible. I am always very much bored by bad jokes, I hope I shall not soon be unlucky enough to have another forced on my notice by Fate.”

“At all events,” said Susie, missing some flavour and spiciness in the conversation which it had owned before, “I hope that it will not be a joke about *me*.”

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, and Susie, taking the gesture as an intimation that it was unimportant to him what or

whom the offensive pleasantry was about, felt aggrieved.

She turned, and glanced first out of the window and then about the room.

"You have a very handsome place," she remarked, in a tone of stiff decorum that made him smile. The words seeming to come forth as by propulsion. As he did not answer, and there was a solemn pause to break, she added in the same Sandford and Merton style, "It is in fact very grand."

"A thing of grandeur is a bore for ever," he said, laughing.

"Do you know what I should do if I lived here—I mean if I were you?" Susie went on, launching out into her usual briskness of tone and manner.

"I cannot imagine. What?" he returned, giving the expected questioning word.

"I should have a tent somewhere under

the trees, and every Wednesday be shown through the house by the house-keeper, and give her half-a-crown at the door."

"*You* are welcome to do it. You shall have a tent put up to-morrow under any tree you select, if you please. It is a gloomy old place," he added.

"I said if *I* were *you*. The house I am living in is quite to my taste. All but my own room."

"Ah!" said Ranicar, in the tone of a man with a taste for enlightenment.

"Yes; I am with Sir Alfred's sister. She lives in the close. In an old church."

"Then you ought to be more ecclesiastical. I find you very secular."

"I think, after all, it may have been an old convent or monastery."

"And how long do you intend staying in this old convent or monastery?"

"Oh! I go very soon now. I have paid a long visit. I shall be thankful, glad, and

happy when I have at last tided over my separation from mamma. I hope this day week to be with her in the Isle of Wight, where we shall probably stay the long winter through."

All this time she had been studying everything in the room but the animate object before her; now she glanced up at him. His face was composed as if he had never in his life known the quiver of muscle, the distension of vein, the droop of eyelid, the inflation of nostril, the involuntary tenseness of nerve about the jaw, that spring from roused, uncontrollable passion, and his light, slight words in answering sounded as if he had never laid the stress of bitter meaning and keen emotion on spoken thoughts.

Susie, with womanly contradictoriness and her own childish perversity, would have given a great deal to know what to say that would call some further sign of

feeling on his immobile face, or into his even tones.

Casting about for the right thing to say often leads to the valueless result of having the very wrong words spring to the lips.

"I hope," she said, uneasily, "that you will not really go in pursuit of Mr.—Everard. He is not worth it."

He gave a languid laugh.

"*Really*, no ; I think not. Unless I happen to hear that he is in a place that I have never seen, and wish to see. Then I may go after him and force him to eat this leaf of his note-book. Enamelled paper, is it not ? Poisonous of course."

"You don't mean literally eat it," said Susie, her eyes becoming round as the buttons on her dress.

"Oh ! yes, I do," he replied, laughing now with genuine amusement.

"Imagine !" said Susie to herself ; "I was once engaged to this *beau seigneur* !"

Unconsciously Ranicar's eyes strayed towards the picture over the mantel-piece. The laugh died away suddenly. But then he never laughed longer at a stretch than two seconds.

"What a lovely face," said Susie, showing by her speech how narrowly she was observing him. "Your sister?"

"My sister. Yes." His eyes moving quickly away.

"The other day we came here—Miss Ogle and I—and the only portrait of you that I saw was the picture of a boy; not more like you than it was like me. A portrait—I think it was of a Ranicar, too," (how smoothly the name slipped out) "was a far better likeness of you."

"He was the tragical one of our family," said Ranicar, carelessly, and seeming disappointingly unobservant of the affable way in which she had pronounced his name. "He had his nose slashed off in a duel.

Fortunately, he had his portrait painted first."

Susie relinquished all idea of being able to stir him again. The last rebuff she had given him forbade the possibility of his ever allowing her an opportunity of giving him another.

"I was thinking only the other day," she said, "what fun it would be to write a novel, and have the hero a man without a nose—a noseless Adonis—who had once been beautiful, and whose loss of comeliness had converted him into a fiend."

She could not even amuse him by her chatter, it appeared, as she had formerly done; for he merely glanced out of the window, saying,—

"Your moment of release has arrived; here comes the brougham."

As he spoke, the crunching of wheels was to be heard on the gravel outside.

"Thank you so much," said Susie, trying

to accomplish the difficult feat of feeling chagrined and speaking gratefully at the same time. "I am—I am—*abundantly* sorry for being so troublesome."

"Oh, not at all," said Ranicar, seeming to think that it was not worth while to be anything but commonplace, and opening the door for her ceremoniously.

"A more grotesque conceit of Fate's than this day has held I could not have imagined," he added, as they went through the hall together. "Well, you will have the satisfaction, Miss Dawnay, of knowing that you have spoken and acted throughout with your usual consistency, and robust candour, and trenchant truthfulness."

Susie, with her eyes cast down, her eyebrows knitted together, could think of no apt reply to make. If she had spoken in correspondence with her mood, she would have said, with a stamp, "I didn't; you shan't; I *will*," leaving these incoherences

to fight their own battle against his indifference.

They were now in the presence of two or three servants. Hungerford placed her in the brougham. She thanked him again with tame formality. The footman shut the door on her disarray and dissatisfaction. She took one swift, devouring glance at Hungerford, standing there, handsome as a knight of romance, in the massive doorway of scabrous grey stone, and then sunk back and closed her eyes.

He turned and went in, with a look of anything but dull despondency.



CHAPTER XV.

IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY.

“**W**ELL-EATING Time” has devoured a few of Susie’s months since we saw her last.

Skip’s misery of waiting is over—his mistress is restored to him.

“The Cottage” is closed, its fair occupants having gone to add to the attractions of a certain great Portland-stone house, with its park, and its pictures, and its other eye-joys and pride-pleasures.

Is not Lady Ogle a possession to be prouder of than all the costly art that ever

was collected, all the trees that ever grew big enough to be called timber, all the uglinesses that ever lasted long enough to be called antiquities?

Mother and daughter both hate St. Quentin's. It is dull, it is dreary, it does not even own the charm of novelty; for they were well acquainted with it and its neighbourhood beforehand. It has no heart-delights to them. There is no sweet association with any of the fine old rooms. To Susie they are painful reminders of an objectionable past experience. To Lady Ogle they are reminders of nothing at all.

They are not intimate with any of their neighbours. They feel remote, unfriended, and alone. To be provided with a husband is not necessarily to be provided with a friend. As a husband, Lady Ogle esteems, respects, prizes Sir Alfred. As a friend, he is a little too punctilious, too stiff, too precise to be quite simpatico.

Susie, having tasted life, pines at being reduced to simple existence.

Lady Ogle, who is fond of travelling, as her wanderings over the continent testify, devours books of travel, picks out the stirring, spiritedly-written parts to read to her husband, and wonders much that they do not awake in him the same desire to see what is so temptingly described that they do in her.

And the winter wears on.

Letters come from Alice—from London, from country houses where she is visiting. Alice is enjoying the pleasures of society.

The men hunt, she writes, and most of the women. She does not. She is mistaken, or disingenuous. She does. Not the little red rover, but his pursuer in pink.

“Mèry,” said Susie, one day, “let us yawn for a wager. I am tired of yawning for nothing. I want you to bet something

very heavy that I yawn oftener than you do from breakfast-time to bed-time. We will count. Let me think—what do I want? Oh, a dressing-case! Come, this point-lace that I am making—”

“Which never will be finished,” put in Lady Ogle, *sotto-voce*.

“Against a handsome tulip-wood dressing-case, that I yawn oftener than you do.”

And Lady Ogle lets Susie win the wager, so that she can give her the dressing-case.

Life is not much livelier after receiving it, handsome as it is.

Susie moralizes to herself, on the insufficiency to satisfy of attained wishes. She has plenty of money, but this has not enabled her to see life “through pink-glass windows,” as she had once confidently predicted.

Her powerlessness to make her daughter happy frets Lady Ogle.

Sir Alfred resists all blandishments, is thick-skinned as to hints, is impervious to poutings, and persists in staying at home, and in making his wife do likewise. Ennui, restlessness and weariness have reached their climax, when a letter arrives from Mrs. Willis begging for shelter for Cora and Alice, Lucy having been attacked with scarlet fever, and the others never having had it.

Lady Ogle telegraphs up at once for them to come; and mother and daughter change their mental attitude of expecting nothing to that of expecting something, and it is refreshing.

Only one day intervened between hearing from them, and receiving them. Susie spent the good useful moments of the greater part of that day in studying the barometer, and repeating over and over again, with the monotony of a cuckoo clock, her hope that to-morrow would be a fine day.

If it were a rainy one, they would come all the same, but people have a way of desiring fine weather as a setting for every sort of valueless or mock-important event.

"It is fine, you see, after all," she exclaimed, on entering the breakfast-room the next morning, beginning to speak the instant she opened the door, as she always did.

"After all what?" said her mother, laughing. "Nobody contradicted you when you said that you thought it would be a good day, for the glass was rising. When you repeated over and over again that you hoped it would be 'the loveliest day that ever was born,' nobody said that they hoped it would not be. When you finally *insisted* that it would be fine, there was not a dissentient voice."

"Susie," said Sir Alfred, judicially, "is a child of her age ——"

"I am not," interrupted Susie, in-

dignantly ; “I have as many grown up ideas as any girl of my age.”

“You misapprehend,” said Sir Alfred, testily. “When I say a child of your age, I mean a child of the nineteenth century. Impatience characterizes the nineteenth century. Greed of the speedy. They want to be rich before they have earned ; they want to know what will happen to them after they are dead, before they have at all discovered what is going to happen to them while they are still living ; they want to comprehend the infinite while they are yet finite. They want instantaneous pictures of things that have taken men the best part of their life to perfect. They want instantaneous news of events that have taken a plurality of slow-working combinations and influences to effect. They are a habnab, helter-skelter, conceited lot. —Another cup of tea, Margaret, if you please.”

All the December hours that deserved the name of day stalked on. Just at that grimy, lead-coloured moment, when the sun has set, and the twilight—which lingers so lovingly in June, creeping stealthily away, so that one hardly knows when it is gone,—was taking to its heels, and leaving England in its cavalier winter fashion, the sound of wheels was to be heard coming up the avenue.

“Here they are!” cried Susie, rushing into the hall, where she gave Alice a polar-bear embrace. (The tip of Alice’s little nose felt like an icicle against her warm cheek.) “I feel like a Selkirk seeing a ship—I feel like a Crusoe finding a Friday—I feel like a pauper picking up a purse full of money,” she cried, jubilantly.

“Oh, dear me, do you?” asked Alice, rather forebodingly, “is it so *very* dull here, then?”

“To say that it is dull, expresses nothing,” said Susie, encouragingly, and, putting her other arm round Cora’s shoulder, as she walked towards an open door, Miss Wix following behind unembraced, uncosssetted, with a large travelling bag on her arm.

“Here they are, mamma,” said Susie, ushering them into the warm, bright morning-room, faintly scented with Indian tea from the tea-pot on the table. “Oh, Cora, how you have grown! You are quite a giraffe.”

“You could not please her more than by telling her that,” observed Alice. “It is her ambition to be as tall as the Tower of Babel.”

Their hats and warm fur jackets thrown aside, they sat chatting and drinking tea until the dressing bell rang.

Alice was looking very pretty; and Cora’s pertness seemed modified, or perhaps

it was only subdued for the moment by the strangeness of her surroundings.

She was allowed to dine with her sister ; and a woeful calamity occurred with the bread sauce.

Alice remarked, under her breath, to Susie, that she was glad of it. It would quench her until she went to bed.

At post-time a little sensation was derived from a letter, in which Miss Gladys Ogle proposed herself from Friday until the following Friday.

Susie became quite noisy in her praise of the good lady, and her self-felicitation at seeing her again so soon. But in a reactionary fit of silence, what heart-stirring memories were recalled with the thought of Miss Ogle. She had not seen Hungerford again after that compulsory visit to him. She had left him with a look of indifference on his face. This recollection had preyed on her.

It must be a very callous, very strangely constituted, young woman, who can bear to see on a face that has once kindled into warm admiration and deep love for her, a proof of the truth of biting old adages relative to man's inconstancy, and the feebleness of woman's hold upon his heart. "He had not often been baffled," quoted Susie to herself. "*I could baffle him,—and punish him with pleasure. But how men can put themselves out of the reach of us poor women ! There was a time when I had once liked him, and he had a strong determination to marry me, yet—*" dwelling on the words of that last interview ; when he had been startled, nettled, angered, into self disclosure—"let poets and story makers say what they please, love is not so strong a power, not half so strong a power, with men as pride, and pique, and retaliation, and many other things," was the

conclusion of Susie's self-communing. How pride-pricked, and piqued, and eager for retaliation she herself was, she perhaps did not realize.



CHAPTER XVI.

CORA.

MISS OGLE was making the acquaintance of young Miss Willis. Scrutinizing her over the rim of her Worcester tea-cup, studying her as she ate bread and butter. Miss Ogle liked to *exploiter* the characters of young people. Analyzing the faculties of middle-aged people she did not think very repaying. It was like reading the last volume of a novel without seeing the first and second, being told the answer to a riddle without previously knowing what the riddle was.

Alice, never contented with being simply herself, was always in imagination the last favourite character in the last novel that had stirred her. She was dashing, startling Elianore Verney at this moment—Elianore Verney being the latest fancy-wraith of a fashionable novelist.

“And so you like visiting in country-houses where there is no hour for breakfast, where there are more men than women, and where you can smoke a cigarette without jostling against anybody’s old-fashioned notions?” said Miss Ogle, quoting Alice to herself, that she might elicit more amusing gabble.

“Yes,” assented Alice, stretching out a booted foot, and examining it critically. “Susie, these boots have a pretty profile, have they not? The heel curves under so well. Yes, that is the life I take to, as a duck takes to water. Just before I came down here I was languishing in Wales with

some relatives of papa's. Worthy people ; oh, deadly worthy, but respectable to make one shudder."

"Poor respectability !" said Miss Ogle ; "and is this the part that it has come to play ? To make young people, who look as if they were painted with reflections of mother-o'-pearl, shudder ?"

"Oh, but you know," said Alice, eagerly, feeling her intentions warped by civility, "touching velvet makes some people shudder, and biting a peach makes others _____"

"And respectability makes *you*," subjoined Miss Ogle, drily.

Alice reddened. "I only meant that they were slow," she said, explanatorily ; "slow—slow as——"

"Slow as you are in finding a simile," said Miss Ogle, laughing.

"Slow as the hour-hand of a clock," suggested Susie. "Now, Alice, I see through

you as if you were a book. You want to shock Miss Ogle. You think she has prejudices, but she has not."

"Oh yes, I have, Susie; I have a strong prejudice against people who wrap parcels in newspapers, who put scent out of a bottle on their pocket-handkerchiefs, who have no adverb but awfully."

"In none of those ways am I an offender," said Alice, gaily, "so I keep out of your black list."

"Do not be too sure that you do," returned Miss Ogle, in the same light tone, but looking at her gaugingly.

At this moment Lady Ogle glided into the room.

"Here is an invitation from the Mal-lalue's to dine there to-morrow evening," she said. "I think I shall let Sir Alfred go with you two young ones, and stay at home myself with Gladys. Gladys, they did not know of your being here, or un-

doubtedly you would have been honoured also."

"It is really very *apropos* of the Mal-lalues," said Susie, "to ask us while you are here, Alice. They have only asked us once before, and it was rather fun. We played pool after dinner. Do you know how to play pool?"

"Of course I do," said Alice, rebukingly; "and I have never pocketed my own ball but three times, often as I have played."

"Do come and have a game at battledore and shuttlecock with me," said Cora, entering, and with a plaintive face and voice walking up to her cousin. "One of you," glancing from Susie to her sister.

"I'll come," said Susie, jumping up and putting down her tea-cup. "It is very good exercise for a wet day like this, when one cannot get out. Will you come, Alice?"

"No," said Alice, "I hate it."

Susie and Cora went out of the room together, betaking themselves to a long gallery lighted by an oriel window at one end.

Here they played until their colour was high, their breath gone, their arms aching.

“Now come and tell me a story,” said Cora, pulling her cousin down beside her on the step of the window.

“I am afraid my tongue has lost its cunning, Cora. What shall I tell you? A fairy story?”

“Oh, I have quite outgrown fairy stories. Tell me something realler. Mamma sometimes tells us what we shall do in the other sphere; but I am tired of that, so *you* needn’t tell me any more. Miss Wix sometimes tells us what she and her sister used to do when they were little. Her sister, the pew-opener, you know, who wears the white cap, and who always has a little tear at the end of her nose—because the church is so cold, you know.”

“No,” said Susie, laughing; “I *don’t* know. I did not know that Miss Wix *had* a sister, and certainly not that the sister was a pew-opener. In London?”

“Yes,” answered Cora, who, like almost all other children, delighted in feeling that she was able to impart information. “In London. A widow. Why, it was she who told us about Mr. Everard; we had been in the Soho bazaar, and they hadn’t any shell ———”

“Mr. Everard?” broke in Susie. “Told you what about Mr. Everard?”

“Oh!” said Cora, clapping both hands on her mouth; “I forgot. I believe Alice said I wasn’t to tell. But never mind about him. Mrs. Star’s husband was a captain of a ship——”

“But I want to hear what she said about Mr. Everard,” cried Susie, giving the child’s shoulder a little shake. “Come, tell me.”

Cora hesitated.

“You shall not drive my new ponies,” said Susie, who, alas! was not above influencing the youthful mind by a mild form of bribery.

This was a clincher.

“I’ll tell you, then,” began Cora.

“Wait,” cut in Susie. “Did you promise Alice that you would not? Because, if you did, I will not hear. One must never break a promise.”

“Oh, I didn’t promise. No, no; I’ll tell you. We had been in the Soho bazaar to buy Lucy a birthday present of one of those pincushions——”

Susie resigned herself to these conscientious and evidently relished preliminaries.

“——Pincushions made out of a shell; and they hadn’t any. And Miss Wix said, ‘My sister has plenty of those shells, and I can easily put a little cushion in it for you, Miss Lucy, so do not cry. We will go there;’ and so we went. Such a funny little room!

And she had just the sort of shell, because her husband was a captain——”

“Yes, yes,” interposed Susie, hastily, “I know—of a ship.”

“Yes. And she said she felt very low—seeing weddings always made her low, because it made her think of the once upon a time when *she* was married to her husband. And she said she had seen a pretty couple enough married that morning. And when she had written her name in the book she saw theirs—Eugene Everard and Léo—something Médor. And when I came home I told Alice. And Alice was frightened—she grew so *white*! She said Miss Wix had no right to take us about in the back streets to see her low relatives, and that I mustn’t, *mustn’t* tell mamma, for so sure as I did, Miss Wix would be sent away. So I never did. I like Miss Wix. It sounded so funny to hear her called Georgiana. Her sister called her Georgiana. And she put a cushion

into the shell, so that it looked exactly like,"
—etc., etc.

Susie sat with her chin down-bent on one cold hand.

She felt that any guess she might make now as to the sender of that unsigned letter to Sir Alfred would not be wide of the mark. It caused her no astonishment; but Alice seemed to her like a pretty word with an ugly meaning, like a graceful flower with a distasteful scent, like a rare Venetian flacon full of stale, vapid water.

She got up abruptly, and, stepping into the window's bow, looked out. The rain had ceased, and the masses of cloud had lifted and drifted, leaving a clear, delicately bright space where the horizon ended. Against this cool, clear tint of aquamarine, stretched the black leafless branches of the elms, reminding her of seaweeds which have been daintily spread on tinted paper; for the effect of these was, in miniature, the same.

It promised to be colder. Indeed, the little currents of air that leaked through the window crevices struck chill.

"Come, let us go down where it is warm," she said, holding out her hand to Cora; "it is too cold to stay here."

"But you'll tell me a story?"

"Oh, yes; a quite true one. Poor little Lucy, I wish she was here to listen to it!"

"I hope we shall have a letter to-night, saying that she is almost well," rejoined Cora, hopefully.

Perhaps the child forecast, since, when the eagerly looked for postman came, he brought a letter from Mrs. Willis, saying that Lucy's attack was a very mild one, and that the doctor had pronounced her to be not dangerously, hardly seriously, ill.



CHAPTER XVII.

MEETING AGAIN.

MR. and the Hon. Mrs. Mallalue were considered an ill-assorted couple. People wondered why they had paired off to tread the minuet of life together. It was a minuet to Mrs. Mallalue, who was subdued in tone and gesture, had never used half of her muscles, or tried the high keys of her voice; but to Mr. Mallalue it was a jig, a break-down, a fandango, a Highland-fling, a Virginian reel, a Saraband—any lively measure short of the *can-can*. He was an invete-

rately "funny" man, jocular in and out of season. If he could not make people laugh *with* him, he was satisfied to have them laugh *at* him. A rather ignominious alter native, some would think.

He had a thin, scarlet face, and his long, sketchy nose did not go straight down the middle of it. His great teeth, yellow, wide apart, and seeming to be loose in their sockets, jumped out at one from behind a tangled wilderness of beard; and one wanted to beg him to brush his "staring" hair with two hair-brushes.

Mrs. Mallalue, who had a resigned and jaded look, bore her antic life-partner with a melancholy fortitude, only sinking back in her chair and applying a jewelled vinaigrette to her nostrils when he was more outrageously exuberant than usual, jumping violently up and down perhaps, sawing his arms through the air, and crowing like a cock—his trousers flapping hideously about

his bony ankles—or trying to swallow the poker; or with noisy cackling and gabbling, persecuting some pretty, shy girl. “Chaffing her” he called it.

Then poor Mrs. Mallalue would, with an air of hopeless weariness, lean her head back, close her eyes, and inhale the invigorating essence. Of course, after dinner was Mr. Mallalue’s time for being most vehemently comic. It is the time when we see clearest whither the currents of men’s being set.

Sir Alfred, Susie, and Alice, on entering the drawing-room the evening they dined there, found him quite flat and sober—comparatively—so effectually quieting were those few dull minutes of waiting to eat and be merry.

Susie, having shaken hands with his wife and him, looked about her to see who were the already assembled guests.

There was a large-eyed little man, who

appeared to be looking into his own head, rather than at the outside world.

We know, though she did not at the time, that he was an artist in words, whose need for self-applause was so urgent that he called himself a poet, and being a rhymers whose verses jingled with ear-catching refrains, he found an indiscriminating few who mistook his ewe-necked hack for a Pegasus.

There was a tall, prosperous, dissatisfied gentleman, answering to the name of Hungerford, who came forward and greeted Susie without effusion. There was an erect, soldierly man, with his left arm in a sling, and his frank, noble face hollowed and worn by recent illness.

There was a youth with a countenance vacant of everything but an eye-glass. There were several more people who seemed to be characterized by nothing but their clothes.

Susie was an image of cold disapproval when she found that the object with the eye-glass had been apportioned to her. She watched with envious concern Hungerford going past with a peony-cheeked lady of sixty on his arm, Alice and a man who, though little and young, seemed lively, and whom she compared favourably with the stoic-idiot who had fallen to her lot, Colonel Carmichael and Mrs. Mallalue.

When they had returned to the drawing-room, and most of the gentlemen had also come in, she knew that the moment had arrived for her to have speech again with her old lover. After so many long days of complete rest to the emotions, it seemed altogether pleasant to be stirred by a thrill of keen anticipation.

Hungerford was walking quietly from the door, where he had lingered for a moment to hear the fag-end of a story, across the room. He was making for her, of course. But he was

not. It was Alice to whom he went. Alice, who looked up at him with her blue translucent eyes, showing the sweetest, most flattered, and flattering surprise. Susie sat on her uncomfortable, long-legged chair quite alone for at least ten minutes, an aggrieved spectator. Watching as a chess-player does his opponent's move, she at last had the satisfaction of seeing him turn and come towards her. She found the expression of Alice's face detestable, it had such a look of justifiable complacency.

"The world, you see, is not large enough to keep us apart," he said with a slight smile.

"A cupboard is large enough to keep two perfectly uncongenial people apart," she replied shortly; "spirits need not mingle, no matter how cornered their imprisoning bodies may be."

"Sharp as usual," he said, with an air of impartial amusement.

“Was I sharp?” said Susie. “I am sorry. I am *rather* sorry,” (qualifying eagerly), “but I do object to feeling that the world is so disobligingly narrow.”

“What possible difference can it make to you whether I am here or not?” he said, with a cold and slighting smile that cut her. “However, keep your temper; let us talk of something else. What did you think of the man who took you in?”

“I thought him very scrubby. His face was as inexpressive, *quite* as inexpressive, as the back of an ivory hair-brush. If I had not known that it would have been of no use, I should have sent up an inward prayer to be given the man with his arm in a sling. Ah! I could have been honest with *him*.”

“Why?” asked Hungerford as she paused.

“Because my honesty would have been sincere flattery, my frankness heart-felt praise. He has fought like a lion. He has

dragged his servant from within range of a murderous fire at the risk of his own life. He has a V.C. Do not tell me," stepping back and looking at him with her fiercest frown, "that you have not heard of Colonel Carmichael."

"No; I shall tell you nothing so absurd. Who has not heard of John Carmichael? I do more than know of him. I know him. Did you not see me talking to him? or was it before you came?"

"I should be overjoyed to know bravery personified!"

"A fine attribute with a human name," he subjoined, striving to be at one with her in her enthusiasm, but in reality nettled by the thought that in her estimation he was, to the wounded soldier, what a crutch is to a sword, a poker to a rapier. *He* had no V.C. The ray-encircled word "hero" was not placed in conjunction with his name. His small deeds of ink were but attained

failures, by the side of the other's successful deeds of blood.

"I think that I have something to say to him by the way," he said, beginning to move off.

"You do not offer to introduce him to me," said Susie, her face taking on a look of depression.

"Do you wish it?"

"Wish it? What tame, poor, insufficient words you use in speaking of him!"

"Will you be kind enough to substitute a word expressive of desire for *wish*, that shall be neither tame, poor, nor inefficient?"

Susie pondered for a moment, and then, shrugging her shoulders, shook her head and laughed.

"I do not think you would be as delighted with him as you suppose," continued Hungerford. "He is too much like you. His manners have all the brusquerie for a man that yours have for a woman.

Capital manners for a man ; wanting in nothing——”

“Whereas——” cut in Susie. “But I will not continue. Are you paying a visit to somebody on the island ?”

“No. Ratsey is building a yacht for me, and I ran down to see how it is getting on. Cockburn—the man who took you in—drove me from East Cowes, where he is stationed at present, guarding the Queen. He told me that they always selected the *best-looking* fellows for that purpose.”

Susie held up two expressive hands without speaking.

“You should see him in his kilt,” went on Hungerford. “It really makes an individual of him.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said Susie. “For I have as yet found that his only claim to being considered a human being is walking upright and smiling.”

“They are going into the billiard-room,

would you like to come?" said Mrs. Mallaloe, in her low, level voice.

"Oh! yes," said Susie. "I hope they will play pool," and started off promptly.

The billiard-room was an agreeable-looking place, with high oak panelling, and sepia drawings of Highland scenery.

The poet, it appeared, played pool with great dexterity, and his first good shot was rewarded by a feminine chorus of applause.

"Oh, I say!" remarked Mr. Cockburn, galvanically. "You'll make Primrose nervous: you'll spoil his next shot."

"Not at all," returned Mr. Primrose; "commendation is the filip to success."

"Aha!" cackled Mr. Mallaloe; "there we have the neat little thing in epigrams! Hear! hear! Give us another, Primrose; make it a rhyme, and I'll have it illuminated and hung up here like a text."

"Have you been here since you left

—— ?” asked Hungerford, pausing by Susie, where she stood a little aloof, and leaning on her cue as a shepherdess on a crook.

“Yes ; ever since.”

“And do you find it ‘grave or gay,’ ‘lively or severe?’”

“I find it grave and severe,” answered she, without hesitation.

“You ride, I suppose ?”

“Yes, I ride. I have a darling horse that Sir Alfred gave me. I have, in fact,” with a sigh, “almost everything.”

“You speak as if that was a burden almost too heavy for you to bear,” said Hungerford.

“It is a trial to wish for things with all your heart and soul, and then to find that the having them is quite as unsatisfactory as the being without them. I have got horribly tired of riding about these quiet roads. Alice is a perfect boon. I am so

glad to have her. Cora, too, is a great privilege. Do you remember Cora?"

"Yes; a pretty little girl. Of course I remember her! And, by the way, I find Miss Willis very much improved."

"She is improved in looks and manners," said Susie, glancing at the rosy fairness of her cousin's straight-featured face with something like bitterness in her heart. "She has seen so much of the world in the last few months, that it has quite burnished her. Perhaps if you see *me* a year from now you will say that I am improved, for I shall have gone through the same process."

"It is not at all likely that I shall—" began Hungerford, when Mr. Mallalue came bundling up to them, full of words, making, as he often did, an interruption about as agreeable as if he had come to show a crushed finger.

Susie wished that he could be pocketed by the poet, like one of his own billiard balls.

Ranicar moved away, leaving her with him, and experienced much gratification from her readable young face.

He saw that Colonel Carmichael was regarding the grace of her figure and position with an eye of favour. He wished that she could be graceful for himself only.

“Hungerford,” said Carmichael, crossing over to him, “is that *the* Miss Dawnay?”

“Yes,” answered the other, curtly.

“Is she differently manifested from what she used to be?”

“Not that I know of. She is very little changed in a year.”

“You told me she was not at all good-looking, that her great charm was being naïve and natural. She is that, but to my thinking she is a great deal more. I should single her out to remember, from a whole room full of girls. I am sure there

is not the deadly sameness about her that there is about most of them. Look here, introduce me to her, will you? It is dull work standing and watching these bad shots made."

"Very well," answered Hungerford.
"Wait till I have played."

But after he had played, he chose to show Miss Willis the exact angle to hit her ball at, and by the time she had carried out his instructions, Carmichael had taken up a new position, and was talking to some one. Further opportunities for introducing the hero to Miss Dawnay he let drift by.

Susie, after covering herself with ignominy, lost her lives, and retired from the game. Seating herself upon a raised oak seat, she watched the various players. Alice, in all sorts of lissome postures, with Hungerford guiding the end of her cue; her cousin's white wrist and hand showing out against the green like a charming *bas*

relief. She seemed to have the most satisfactory speeches to make to him, too ; satisfactory to herself and to him, judging by the expression of both their faces.

Mr. Mallalue, induced partly by choice, partly by his sense of obligation as host, doomed Susie to two or three raids on her patience, bounding up to her side like a kangaroo between his turns in the game.

“There we have a correct representation of how it begins,” he said, on one of these occasions, and nid-nodding his head violently in the direction of Hungerford and Alice.

He had either never heard of Susie’s engagement, or else had forgotten it.

Susie herself remembered it all the time in the same sort of way that she remembered her name was Susie, and that she was eighteen years old.

“Of how what begins?” she asked, bluntly.

“Oho! Miss Dawnay; don’t you play ’possum? You know well enough what I mean; the way it begins when it means to end in St. George’s and white favours.”

“I am afraid that I am not so quick in seeing into such things as you are,” she returned, with a cold smile.

“She is a pearl!” exclaimed Mr. Mallaloe, going into a fussy rapture. “Very fine-looking, upon my word.”

“A fine-looking pearl!” thought Susie, contemptuously. “He will say next ‘An angel—in very good form; a lily—as pretty as paint.’”

Only once again before they left did she speak to Hungerford. Then he slipped into Mr. Mallaloe’s place, as his host went off to play, in an explosion of laughter at one of his own jokes.

“Is he not like a wild man of Borneo?” she said, forgetting in her disgust that she was at the moment enjoying his hospitality.

“Your travels must have extended further than mine. I have never been in Borneo,” answered Hungerford.

“Nonsense! Nor I. I saw them at a show once, when I was paying a visit to Grandmamma Dawnay. I wish I had enough moral courage not to laugh at his jokes, when their stupid flatness makes me feel more like crying. Now I know that you dislike laughing, except at *Alice's* wit, so why do you not take a firm stand with Mr. Mallalue, and look as saddened as you feel when he bores you with one of these wretched anecdotes that he is addicted to?”

“Well, we will *both* hold out against encouraging his vice of being a bore. We will not so much as smile if he repeats one of his choicest, most favourably received jokes.”

“Oh, Mr. Hungerford,” said Alice, floating up gauzy, daisied, entreating. “I am

in the saddest position ; do come and show me what to do !'

And Hungerford stepped down with a pleased promptness, and it was Susie who was left in the "saddest position."



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BULL.

THE cold had increased throughout the day, and snow had fallen steadily up to six o'clock ; everything was therefore covered with a wintry whiteness ; the air was still, the clouds hung low, and the weather seemed to be making up its mind as to what it should do, —rain, snow, or clear.

With the lights of the dog-cart carrying Mr. Cockburn and Hungerford flashing along just in front of them, Sir Alfred and his two charges drove through the long avenue of Stillwell, and out at the gate.

Alice was monopolizing the conversation, quoting Hungerford lavishly. Indeed, she did not say a dozen words without dragging his name in, or repeating whole sentences of his ; and all in a tone of exhilaration—of exultation—which caused Susie to shrink back into a corner, as if she were getting out of the range of a boy with a pea-shooter.

At length, she could not abstain from saying,—

“ You and he seem suddenly to have discovered each other’s good qualities, Alice.”

“ Better late than never,” returned Alice, gaily—a gaiety that made Susie feel tragic. “ And perhaps we may develop new graces in each other’s eyes, as he is to be at Cowes a week.”

“ Since you and he are very sensibly not *en delicatessen*, Susie, I will ask him to dine then. He is a very agreeable fellow,” said Sir Alfred.

“*En delicatessen!*” repeated Alice, trilling out a laugh. “I think it must only have been a sort of business-like arrangement between them, Sir Alfred, about whose end they would no more show or feel anything like sentiment than if they had agreed to take an opera-box together, and then mutually agreed to give it up.”

At this turning of her life drama into a burlesque, Susie was bitterly angry. But she made no retort, feeling that silence was her best safe-guard against being misunderstood.

“I scarcely think that an outsider is qualified to give an authentic version of—things of this sort,” said Sir Alfred, unresponsively.

Alice was hushed for a few minutes, and they drove on mute, the wheels rolling noiselessly through the snow.

The dog-cart was still in front of them, the light from its lamps falling in two

broad shafts on the hedges at each side of the road, sometimes lighting up the figures of certain men looking like farm labourers, in groups usually, and one or two having pitchforks.

“How many men there are on this generally deserted road to-night,” said Susie. “Does it mean anything, I wonder?”

Sir Alfred leaned forward, and became more observant. He had not before thought of looking out.

At this moment the dog-cart paused at the toll-gate, and they, too, stopped.

A knot of men were standing on the step, and the gate-keeper was shouting something vociferously to the occupants of the dog-cart.

“What is he bawling about?” said Alice, impatiently, and burying the tip of her cold nose in her white cloak.

“Hark!” said Susie, holding up her hand, and bending more eagerly forward to

listen. "I just lost what it was he seemed to be warning them about, by your speaking. I am sure he was cautioning them against something. Do let me touch the check, and make James get down and tell us."

Without waiting to be answered, she pulled the check-string, and the servant appeared at the window.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"If you please, 'm, the gate-keeper has a fear that the bull might run at the lights."

"The bull! What bull?" cried Susie, in a tremor.

"Oh! if you please, 'm, I thought as you might have heard. It was being drove to Chessel Farm, and what with the cold and the sight of the snow, it went mad like, and got off. They are in hopes to catch it——"

"And it is now raging about the roads?"

“The roads being white, m’am, and it being white, and the night set in, they lost track of it where the Yaderland Road meets the Newport Road. They were only afeared of the lamps——”

“Sir Alfred! Have them put out!” cried Susie, breathlessly.

“By no means,” replied Sir Alfred. “I do not find myself very apprehensive of the bull. Ha! ha! Go on, James.”

“Are you really not nervous about it, Sir Alfred? Why, the very thought of it makes my teeth chatter. Now the groups of men we met are accounted for. And we have so far to go yet!”

“I am exceedingly sorry that you were told anything about it. Your cousin is not nervous, are you?”

“No,” said Alice, with her roulade of a laugh. “I think it ridiculous. It makes me think of the old saying—‘a bull in a china shop.’ I wonder if those men in the

dog-cart are nervous. I think I'll thrust my head out and ask them. At all events, they have not put out their lights."

She opened the window as she spoke.

"I do not think it worth while for you to do so," said Sir Alfred, detaining her. "You probably would not make them hear."

"Oh, bother!" said Alice, and sank back, rather shorn of good manners in Sir Alfred's opinion.

Susie sat quaking and counting the minutes; Sir Alfred had a refreshing little doze, broken rudely by a cry from Susie, who was in front of him, and in a half-second some large white object flashed past the window. The horses shied and plunged so violently, that the Clarence rocked; there was a muffled bestial noise; then they heard in front of them a faint thud, followed by the crash of broken glass.

He threw down the window and leaned out. Ahead of them was the dog-cart overturned in the ditch, and his own horses, unable to meet this second shock, gave two or three bounds as they passed by it, and with snorts of terror set off galloping as fast as their spirited legs would carry them.

Susie, with a sharp scream, seized hold of the handle of the door. I am sorry to say that while Alice remained calm, she lost all presence of mind, becoming beside herself with terror.

"*Never* jump out," began Sir Alfred, attempting to stay her; but with witless struggles she freed herself, and the door flying open, she launched herself out. She felt as if a great cold pain leaped up to meet her, and then all was as nothing.

When she next was conscious of existence, she found herself lying on a strange bed in a strange, beautiful room full of

carved furniture and unfamiliar pictures. Two women and a man were bending over her.

“Where am I?” she asked, trying to lean on one elbow.

“You are at Mr. Gream’s,” said one of the women in a soft voice. “At Willow-pool—Mr. Gream’s.”

“*Am* I?” said Susie. “The old gentleman who plants umb——! And what have I done to myself that I feel so strangely?”

“You have broken your arm,” said the man (a doctor), persuasively; “and now I am just going to put this handkerchief soaked in ether over your nostrils while I set it. Do not be in the least alarmed, it is a very simple fracture.”

Cowardly though Susie was in a case of danger, she was brave about bearing pain, and endured having her arm set and placed in splints with dumb fortitude.

“You will be obliged to stay here precisely as you are for a day or two,” said the doctor, after giving her a restorative. “They have sent to your family that they may be spared uneasiness.”

“Uneasiness !” murmured Susie ; “mamma will be here as soon as horses can bring her, unless——” starting up from the pillow. “Where are the others ? What has become of Sir Alfred and my cousin ?”

The woman who had spoken before now stepped forward. “It is thought that the horses have run home without accident to the carriage. The gentlemen who were upset from the dog-cart have been brought in here. One of them is hurt.”

“Which one ?” asked Susie, faintly.

“I do not know either of their names,” answered the girl, who had a subdued, somewhat Quakerish manner. “Would you like me to go and ask ?”

“Please,” said Susie.

The girl went out of the room. The doctor, after giving some directions to the other woman, who seemed to be a maid or housekeeper, returned to Susie's side, and on a few encouraging words to her, hurried away.

In ten minutes the girl came back. "It is the gentleman named Hungerford, who has cut his head. It is not serious."

"I am very glad to hear it," answered Susie. "Thank you. How did you know where to send to tell them about me?"

"The other gentleman told me."

"A delightful night it is giving you, having your house turned into a hospital," said Susie, the cordial working pleasantly in her brain, so that she laughed amusedly.

"I assure you," answered the girl, quietly, "it is a pleasant change."

"It is very kind of you to take it in that spirit," said Susie.

"As no one is very much hurt," added

the girl. "It would be heartless of me to say it was pleasant if any one had been brought in to suffer."

"How long will it take them to go to St. Quentin's and back?" asked Susie, directly.

"George took the fastest horse, but it had to be saddled. Indeed, I cannot quite tell how long he will be gone; but it is not far to St. Quentin's."

Something in her tone as she said the last seven words made Susie look at her curiously; but the two candles serving to light the carven wilderness showed her only the contour of a small head and a tall figure slight to tenuity.

"Pray go to bed," she said, in her blunt way. "Where are we among the hours?"

The girl walked towards the candles, and drawing a watch from her belt looked at it.

"It is half-past one," she answered, turning and coming back before Susie had had time

to catch more than a glimpse of a delicate profile in silhouette against the light.

“Thanks,” she rejoined. “Now, do go. There will be somebody to let mamma in if she should come before morning?”

“I have arranged about that,” replied the girl. “But if you think that you may feel nervous and strange in this unfamiliar room, and after the fright and pain that you have had, pray let me stay with you; at least, until your mother comes. I should be more than willing: glad; pleased. Sleep and I are all but strangers to each other.”

“Really?” said Susie, who had found sleep a kindly tyrant always. “And why is that? Is it from tea; or coffee?”

The girl drew a low chair to the side of the bed, and seated herself.

“It is from weariness,” she said. “But you go to sleep; and only remember that I am here if you wake bewildered, or needing ——”

"I never heard before of a person *not* sleeping from weariness," interrupted Susie.

"There must be a first time for hearing everything," answered the girl, and then sat quiet in her carved arm chair, her head resting on her hand.

Now and then one meets people who seem to haunt rooms rather than inhabit them, and this girl was one of these beings.

Susie, drowsily aware of her before she actually dropped asleep, found her taking on fantastic shapes. She was the woman who had been a cat; she was a spell-bound princess, waiting for a counter-spell; one of the beautiful seven of Schonberg.—The Lady of the Cold Kisses. Always something nameless and mythical.

At dawn Lady Ogle glided into the room. The fire was winking on the hearth, disclosing the dull crimsons and blues of a Persian rug in front of it. The two candles were burning still, throwing out here and

there a grotesque oak face on wardrobe or cabinet, or flashing on the steel ring of a drawer, and showing the lady her daughter, quietly asleep under a crimson coverlet, compassed about with oaken roses and leaves, and watched by a motionless stranger in a high-backed chair, her cheek resting on her hand.

But as she entered the figure rose, whispering, "Your daughter is asleep." And, motioning to her to take the chair she had been occupying, added, "the pain of her arm is very slight. She is resting well," and glided out of the room.

When Susie opened her eyes they met her mother's face. She was almost inclined to believe that the other watcher beside her had been a mere evocation of fancy.

"You need not have come through the cold, mother," she said, as Lady Ogle kissed her. "My arm has a dull ache in it. That is all ; and I suppose I am rather bruised ;

I am so stiff. Do tell me about Sir Alfred and Alice. Are they safe?"

"Yes; quite safe. The horses ran home without upsetting the carriage."

Nearly all that day Lady Ogle stayed with her daughter.

The doctor said that the day after tomorrow she should go home.

Hungerford, it seemed, must be a prisoner at Willowpool for several days longer. His head was badly cut and bruised, superinducing fever and a racking headache.

Lady Ogle, not wishing to quarter herself on Mr. Gream,—more especially since there was a silent feud of years' standing between Sir Alfred and him—left her daughter, and returned to St. Quentin's in time for dinner at a quarter to eight.

Then it was that Susie's friend of the night before came into the room, which she had not entered before that day.

Again the dimness of the light baffled Susie's scrutiny. She began to be in a fever of curiosity to see what the girl actually looked like.

"You are getting better?"

"I am feeling quite well, thank you, Miss Gream." (She had learnt that the young woman was mad Mr. Gream's daughter.)

"Quite well enough to get up."

"The doctor knows best; I have great faith in him. He brought me through a terrible illness two years ago."

"What was the matter with you?" asked Susie, with that somewhat bald arrangement of words to which she was addicted.

"Weariness," answered Miss Gream. "Weariness of life," she added under her breath. "The fact was," she continued aloud, "that I got so tired of never having an appetite, and not being able to sleep more than two or three hours of a night,

that I tampered with—things, and brought on a dangerous illness.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Susie, all agog; “what made you do that?”

“I have just told you.”

“But something must have taken away your appetite and prevented your sleeping, that is what I mean.”

“Everything must have a cause. The *cause* had *everything* in my case. Hope, health, happiness. He left me nothing.”

Susie was dumb from surprise and sympathy.

“I have committed myself,” said the girl composedly. “But it does not matter.”

“I never tell anything that is said to me in confidence,” returned Susie, in the fashion of a solemn invitation to be told more.

At this moment a whisper, hissing and penetrating, sounded through the almost closed door.

“Goldy!” it said.

"I am coming, father," answered the girl, appropriating the word.

"Do come back," said Susie.

"As soon as I can," replied Miss Gream, and vanished. But Susie did not see her again that night.

The following day, after Lady Ogle, having spent the morning with her daughter, returned home for luncheon, Miss Gream made her appearance.

"Why do you not come when my mother is here? she is dying to thank you for your thoughtfulness and kindness," said Susie, enjoying to the full a perfect daylight acquaintance with the features and form that had so tantalized her in the owl-light of her dim room.

"I am afraid of her."

"Afraid of her!" exclaimed Susie, divided between astonishment and indignation.

"I am the natural consequence of an unnatural mode of training. My father is all

unlike other men, and I have suffered for it, being made like other women. I have lived here like a prisoner of state. I am shy, to pain, diffident, to misery. When you are up and dressed again I shall run away from you."

"Then I'll run after you," said Susie, laughing.

"I have had some one run after me once," said the girl, her face changing. "It was to give me back a book I had left in the copse. Never before had such a thing happened to me. To hear footsteps behind me that meant anything for *me*."

"It is strange," said Susie, thoughtfully, "that I have never come across you, roaming as I have done in all the lanes and roads about here. And for so long."

"I had seen *you* once before," said the girl.

"Where?" asked Susie impulsively.
"When?"

“More than a year ago. You were driving with—Mr. Everard.”

The blood came flaming up into her pale cheeks, and deepened there for shame at her want of self-mastery.

Susie swallowed an emotional something that rose in her throat, and looked away from her considerately.

“I was inside my own gates,” said Miss Gream, as if trying to talk down the impression left by her change of colour. “I never go outside of them, scarcely. We neither of us do, my father nor I.”

“Terrible,” murmured Susie, secretly thinking that her seclusion and inaccessibility had made her an object of attraction to Eugene. “How is Mr. Hungerford to-day?” she asked, to change the subject.

“He is better.”

“The horse shied at the bull?”

“Yes ; so violently that the dog-cart was upset.”



CHAPTER XIX.

A PEPPERED ROSE.

AN interesting sequel to an adventure, with her arm in a sling and a loose French jacket of her mother's, trimmed with silver-fox, over her shoulders, its full sleeves dangling as those of a mediæval saint—Susie, alone and unseen, walked slowly down the stairs, too impatient and tired of restraint to wait quietly in her room for the carriage which was to be sent for her in the course of the morning.

At the foot of the stairs she paused,

hesitating. Then, seeing a door ajar near her, she walked to it and looked into the room. No one was there.

It was a very odd room. All pale buff, black, gold, and café-au-lait colour. Bronzes, bas-reliefs, pictures, filled well-chosen places honourably. The room made her think of an autumn day, first of all; then of a menagerie. For a picture had been unfastened from a little gilt cross-shaped stand, and the stand appropriated to a white cockatoo. Four dormice, rolled in perfectly round balls, and fast asleep, were on the Persian rug in front of the fire, with their absurd little Hindoo faces upside down, exposed to the revivifying influence of the blaze. Already their delicate little pink claws were beginning to work convulsively, as summer life came back to them.

A parrot of fine conversational powers was making profane remarks from his cage

on an ebony chair in the corner ; while a white rabbit, with one lop-ear, and eyes like pink jelly, was inquisitively smelling the black legs of one of four little Ethiopians supporting a gilded Venetian table.

While Susie was taking in this combination of nature and art, two people slowly entered the room ; Miss Gream and Hungerford.

“ Oh !” said Susie, turning at the sound of their footsteps. “ I hope you are quite recovered, Mr. Hungerford.”

“ Very nearly,” he answered, shaking hands with her. “ And you ?” laughing. “ We are like two disabled soldiers who have been in action together.”

“ Yes,” replied Susie, glancing down at her arm ; “ I feel exactly like Colonel Carmichael.”

Hungerford moved away and took an easy-chair.

“Are these your pets?” asked Susie, turning to Miss Gream, with a smile.

“They belong to me; but they are not pets, because I never pet them. Every morning when I come down I find the dormice trying to hibernate; and it amuses me to put them down by the fire and restore them. It is delightful to think that you thwart Nature, even if it is only in preventing her carrying out her original intentions as to dormice. Then the parrot, to judge from her looks and conversation, holds the transmigrated soul of a burnt witch, and I like to feel that I keep a soul in a cage. The cockatoo is only interesting because he was given to me by some one I shall never see again. The rabbit is an infanticide. Yesterday morning there were five young rabbits in the hutch; this morning there were two and a half. You can imagine what became of them. *I saw!* Come rabbit; it is time for you to go to

the billiard-room. I keep them in the billiard-room," she explained ; " no one ever plays billiards in it, so I had their hutch brought there, that I need not stand in the cold and rain to watch them."

She caught up the rabbit by his ears, and carried him off kicking galvanically.

" What a strange girl," said Susie, in a low voice.

" Yes ; she seems to me like a woman with a branded heart."

" If she is, I think I know who branded it!" said Susie, somewhat melo-dramatically. " But don't ask me to tell you, for I shall not."

" I had no idea of being so indiscreet," he replied. " It seems that you might have been spared that broken arm," he continued, " by keeping still, as your cousin did. Have you not heard that unless in exceptional cases you should not jump out?"

“Of course I have,” answered Susie, impatiently ; “probably quite as often as my judicious cousin. But I had a raging impulse to jump out, and I did. You know that if you jump out there is an end to the feeling that you are being run away with by horses that may spring over a precipice, and reduce you to a mangled nothing.”

“But, on the other hand, they may run home—as these did—without bringing the carriage to grief.”

“I can imagine Alice getting out in the stable-yard and congratulating herself that she did not do as I did. But I shall see her to-day, and perhaps she will tell me whether she did or not.”

“It would be only natural if she did.”

“Oh ! of course,” said Susie, getting up and beginning to walk on a tour of observation about the room.

There were a few books on the table ; she picked up one that caught her eye from

its rich, dainty binding, and carelessly turned over the leaves. In an instant she had dropped it as if it stung her.

“What grim discovery have you made?” asked Hungerford, rising and coming beside her.

Without speaking, she opened the book at the title-page, and held it up to him. “Goldy, from E. E. E.” was inscribed thereon in handwriting they both knew.

Neither did he say anything; only glancing at the words, and then away from them at her.

“I blush⁴ in the dark!” murmured Susie, half to herself, and disconnectedly.

“You blush in the dark, did you say?” asked he quickly. “For him, do you mean?”

“No, for myself. I hate to remember the pleasure his insincere civility gave to me when I first knew him. The very first time I talked to him is the time I should like to have over again; it was all so ridiculous!

When the thought of it comes over me, I cannot help muttering something at myself, and growing hot, and biting my lips. I suppose I need not torment myself any longer about it; it is all past and gone now."

"Why, what could you have said?" asked Hungerford, magnifying trebly in his imagination Susie's childishness and naïveté.

"There is not a word in the dictionary to express how absurd the things were that I said to him," answered Susie, uncomfortably.

"And I suppose what he said to you was equally absurd?" suggested Hungerford.

"Yes; but I did not think so then. He was the first man who had ever treated me as if I were something better than a sort of prickly pear, and I was pleased out of all proportion—much more pleased than I was when *you* allowed me to see that I did not bore you a bit."

“One has to discipline their patience by remembering that honesty is a gem without a flaw, or really you are——” began Hungerford, piqued into not taking what she said in the right spirit.

“No, I am not,” she cut in, hotly.

“You do not know what I was going to say.”

“Yes, I do ; I have often had it said to me before, by people who had *a right* to say it.”

“It is quite impossible that you should know,” answered he, coldly. “The most penetrating persons cannot form conclusions as to unspoken words.”

“Well, what was it ?” asked Susie, coming back from the window where she had gone in displeasure, and looking up at him with a bright smile. “What were you going to say ?”

“That one must lay great stress in their mind on frankness being an amiable

quality, or they can only remember that truth in a crude form (as you give it) is about as agreeable as smelling a peppered rose."

"A peppered rose!" said Susie, with an angry laugh.

"It exactly expresses what you are," continued Hungerford. "A peppered rose—there could not be anything more nicely appropriate."

Susie now arrived at that point of indignation where laughing is impossible.

"I never saw a man who thought himself such an autocrat as you do," she remarked, with raw point-blankness.

"You have seen very few men," he answered, temperately. "I know what your acquaintance was in London. You perhaps knew a minor canon or so, at ———; and as for Slowcome, or Beaucome, off the rails here, I can imagine what you have had of masculine surroundings. You know ex-

tremely little of men—so little that, Miranda like, you found a demi-god in the first one who, not superannuated, or a professional winder of clocks, or paperer of walls, darkened your doors. You open your eyes : I am not speaking from intuition, but from a few careless words let fall by Lady Ogle when I was down here last year, to which I owe my enlightenment.”

“As Mr. Mallalue would say, ‘Here we have the law laid down!’” rejoined Susie, going away to another window and looking out. He followed her.

“The more I see of you, the more I think what an amusing companion you would be for a lifetime,” he said, an inflection of tenderness softening the unsentimental words.

Susie, waiving the tone, heeded only the words, and turned to him with angry eyes, ripe for a quarrel. But as her lips parted to speak Miss Gream entered the room, and Susie moved quickly away from the window.

“Who did you say you felt like?” asked Miss Gream, abruptly. “You said it just before I went out of the room.”

“Colonel Carmichael!”

“Ah! I thought you said so. I have seen his name in the newspapers until I feel familiar with it. I have watched his career as I would a comet. And *you* know him, then!” She spoke in a tone tinged with envious melancholy.

“No; but he is charming,” said Susie, quickly. “I think Irishmen are under a vow to be more charming than the rest of the world ——”

“But he is not Irish,” corrected Hungerford, mildly.

“Oh! he *must* be,” said Susie, positively, yet looking rather blank; “why, he has blue eyes and black hair, and Carmichael has a thoroughly Irish sound. Michael, Car, you know; he *must* be Irish.”

“That is something like arguing that

Machiavelli must have been a Scotchman because his name begins with Mac," said Hungerford. "Carmichael is not an Irish name."

"Now do not say that I ought to have known it was not," cried Susie, laughing, yet frowning.

"By no means. *Possibly* Carmichael,—if what you have just said, you had said to him—would have found your recognition of his Irish charms of blue eyes and black hair more flattering than your ignorance of his family and name."

"His mother was Irish, perhaps," returned Susie, persistently.

"Irish? No; she was a Miss Carmichael, who married her cousin."

"I am dumb," said Susie.

"The carriage for Miss Dawnay," said a servant, at the door.

"They have sent Mrs. Tilly, I suppose? Please ask her to go up and collect my

things, and bring me my hat." Then Susie turned to Miss Gream: "how can I ever thank you for your kindness!" she said taking her hand. "Mr. Hungerford, what shall *you* say when you thank Miss Gream?"

"Hush!" cried Miss Gream, before Hungerford could answer, and pressing her fingers over her ears; "I ought to thank *you*, for breaking the dead monotony of my life. I feel as if I had got out of a coffin to go to a feast. Hearing your voice, and looking into your happy bright face, is a feast to me. Do not thank me. I will not hear you."

"But shall I never see you any more? Will you not come over to St. Quentin's so me day?"

The girl seemed to shudder.

"Not there!" she muttered. Then, louder, "I shall hope to see you at some

time or other. And I shall always remember you."

Susie rose, and she likewise.

Then the maid came into the room with a cloak and hat ; and a note, which she handed to Hungerford. A small cream-coloured note, that Susie glanced at with swift recognition.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand to him. "I suppose you, too, will be well enough to leave in a day or two?"

"Yes. I shall see you again before I leave the island : I am coming over to call on Lady Ogle and your cousin."

She simply bent her head, and went out of the room. He was too invalided to think of seeing her to the carriage.

Miss Gream walked along by her side.

"Tell me," she whispered, in a way that was all but distraught, "did you know him ever?—Everard?"

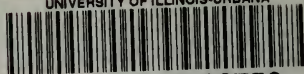
"Mr. Everard? Yes, I should think I

did. He is married now, and gone to America. England is a gainer by his loss, I think. Good-bye. I am going to try and coax you out of your shell, soon."

And so the two parted.

END OF VOL. II.

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